

A CLOCKWATCHER GOD

PSALM 37:10-20 MAY 8, 2019

In the wake of World War 2, our culture has become infatuated with the idea of predicting the end of the world, or at least humanity. Whether it was the Population Bomb which said disaster was coming in the 80's or climate alarmists who said we only had a few years to save the polar ice caps, there's always someone putting a countdown out there. In 1947 some people developed what is known as "The Doomsday Clock." Which is meant to "represents the likelihood of a man-made global catastrophe."¹ The idea is that, when the clock strikes midnight, it's all over for mankind. And then these researchers tell you what time it is on the clock when they evaluate nuclear threats, climate change and who knows what else. Right now the clock is set at 11:58pm.² Queue scary music!

The truth is, there *is* an end coming and it will arrive according to a very definite time table. We got a look at it as we studied through the book of Daniel. It is *God* who sets the clock of history, and, we learn from David in Psalm 37 that God is diligently *watching* that clock as well.

You've probably heard about the theory of God being a 'clockmaker'. That, yes, there's a God and He created the universe, but like a 'clockmaker,' He simply made the machine, wound it up and then walked away. He's not involved in the universe, so the theory goes. Of course, this is not only contrary to what the Bible says, it's contrary to the witness of history as well. God *is* the clockmaker, in that He made all things, but He's also a *clockwatcher*, and He is intricately involved in this universe, moment by moment. Here, David depicts the Lord as carefully watching the clock of history, counting down the days to the end, when the wicked will be repaid for their evil and the children of God will be lavishly rewarded according to the riches of His grace.

As we saw last time, here in Psalm 37, David is an old man and has much wisdom to share with us about life and Godliness, peace and perspective. Throughout the text we're reminded again and again of the Kingly reward that is coming for God's people, their inheritance at the end of this era.

We jump in tonight at verse 10, where we read:

Psalm 37:10 - ¹⁰For 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.

There is no greater contrast than the one depicted in this Psalm. You have the delights of the righteous versus the destruction of the wicked. Now, in movies like *An Inconvenient Truth* when they make their predictions, they often end up being proven to be not *quite* true, or at least sensationalized hyperbole. The ice caps *didn't* melt in 2016. They said there would be no snow on Mt. Kilimanjaro. That's been chalked up to "literary license" now.³

But when *God* says judgment is going to fall and the wicked will be no more, it's not hyperbole. That's the certain future for those who reject Jesus Christ. No second chances, no work-release program in purgatory. Each individual has a life to live, a choice to make concerning Jesus the Messiah and, when they die, then comes judgment for those who will not receive God's free gift of salvation.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doomsday_Clock

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2019/01/24/doomsday-clock-is-stuck-minutes-midnight-symbolic-hour-apocalypse/?utm_term=.c0ffef5ea3fd

³ <https://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/conservation/conservationists/inconvenient-truth-sequel-al-gore.htm>

The wicked of the world seem to hold a lot of cards today, they seem to have their run of the place, but, in the end, they'll be dealt with. There will be no place for them. There will be no underground black market in heaven, no rebel dissidents hiding in the hills. Sin and evil will be eradicated altogether like Smallpox. Even *more* than Smallpox, since it still exists in 2 labs today.⁴

Psalm 37:11 - ¹¹But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

What an amazing promise it is to hear that it is those who are *meek* who will rule with the Lord. Think of David's time, especially, where kingdoms were formed by might and bloodshed. But, God chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

The largest non-government land owner in the world is? The Catholic Church. The estimated land held by the Pope is about 177 million acres.⁵ Little more than the state of Texas. I guess the Catholic Church is kind of a government. The private individual who owns the most land on planet earth these days is Australian mining magnate Gina Rinehart. She owns more than 46,000 square miles of land in Australia, which is about the size of Mississippi.⁶

That all sounds like a lot, but you and I are going to inherit the whole earth! Right now there are 197 million square miles of land around the globe. It's going to be given to us, restored, renewed, filled with the glory of God. No property taxes or off-limits sites. All ours.

Here in verse 11 we have the 2nd of 5 times that David will tell us that God's people are going to inherit the earth. 3 times it says earth, twice more it says "land" but the Hebrew word is the same. Our inheritance is a *sure* promise. As part of that inheritance we're told that we will enjoy an abundance of peace. Peace means more than just an absence of strife or conflict. It expresses "completeness, wholeness, harmony, fulfillment...[and] unimpaired relationships with others."⁷

We have quite a future to look forward to. But we don't have to *wait* to start enjoying the peace of God. Remember how often "grace and peace" are extended to us in the New Testament letters. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, spoke to us so that we might have peace now to guard our hearts and minds and, along with *experiencing* God's peace for ourselves, we're commanded to live at peace with others as much as possible. The land inheritance of verse 11 may be off in the future, but we can dip into the reservoir of God's peace today in our personal experience and relationships.

Psalm 37:12 - ¹²The wicked plots against the just, And gnashes at him with his teeth.

We hear that phrase, "gnashing teeth" and it makes us think of how it's used in the New Testament. A sad characteristic of hell is that it will be a place where men gnash their teeth in agony. The Bible is clear that you reap what you sow. Those who embrace wickedness and take delight in gnashing their teeth toward the innocent will reap a harvest of judgment, gnashing their teeth for all eternity.

Psalm 37:13 - ¹³The Lord laughs at him, For He sees that his day is coming.

⁴ <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/diseases-conditions/smallpox>

⁵ <https://www.newstatesman.com/global-issues/2011/03/land-queen-world-australia>

⁶ <https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/discover-who-owns-most-of-the-planet-12488369>

⁷ Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament

Our God is not a toothless figurehead. He is a furious warrior when it comes to protecting His people. In 2nd Corinthians Paul talks about knowing the *terror* of the Lord. Though God does not delight in the death of the wicked, in the end He will cut them down. Their plans and their efforts mean nothing when facing His ultimate wrath. In the end, the Lord comes at them with the full force of His judgment, and His fury is justified. Look at verse 14.

Psalm 37:14 - ¹⁴The 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.

Injustice is not insignificant to God. It is a big deal. From heaven's perspective, injustice and persecution and oppression and resistance against God's people is not just some rude prank, they are murderous acts of hatred. If you're not a Christian, you are a member of the camp here in v14.

Maybe you find yourself thinking, "Well, not every non-Christian is that way. I have plenty of friendly, non-believing friends." Sure. Not every non-believer is a God-hating atheist or someone who persecutes Christians. But, there are only two camps a person can be a part of. You can belong to Christ or you can belong to this world and its ruler, the Devil. There *is* a real, personal Devil and he *is* a savage adversary of God's people. His goal is to kill and destroy and tear down and, we're told, he holds unbelievers *captive* to do his will, whether they signed up for the fight or not.

Now, on the flip side, these enemies of ours who are drawing the sword and bending the bow, they may be at war with God and with us by extension, but in the Church age, these are people we're sent out to rescue. We're sent to *reconcile* these people with God and save them from the coming destruction.

PUBG and Fortnite are wildly popular video games right now. If you're not familiar with them, you're dropped onto a map and everyone battles it out to the last man or the last team standing. As the fight goes on, there's a shrinking circle. If you're outside that circle you start dying. It's the 'blue zone.'

The Christian life is incredibly counter-intuitive. In the Bible, we learn that, out in the world there are enemies, held captive by the Devil to do his will and his will is to devour and destroy whoever he can, especially the people of God. Now, those enemies are *not* going to be victorious in the end. Jesus has already won the victory. But the Lord sends us out *into* the blue zone (in a sense) to try to rescue the people who are actively warring against God and His people. It's an amazing grace that God pours out to and through us.

Psalm 37:15 - ¹⁵Their sword shall enter their own heart, And their bows shall be broken.

When we hear news of convicted criminals receiving light sentences, it upsets us. In the courtroom of eternity, all punishments are fair. The guilty receive what is just. It's a reminder to us that we, too, deserve death, but Jesus Christ paid our penalty at the cross so that we might be saved.

Verse 15 also echoes what Jesus would later say in Matthew 26: Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.

Psalm 37:16 - ¹⁶A little that a righteous man has *is* better than the riches of many wicked.

God talks a big game when it comes to His rewards and gifts. But it's not just hype, His promises and provisions are expansive and lavish. When He rewards you, He does so many times over.

In 2011 a Minnesota waitress received what was possibly the world's largest cash tip for a meal: \$12,000. She was so taken aback she tried to return it. Her customer wouldn't allow it. So, she turned it in to the police. After 60 days, it was hers for the keeping.⁸ That's a remarkable reward for restaurant service. But the Bible tells us that, as we serve the Lord and do the work of a sower, He will reward us and produce a harvest of 30, 60, even 100 times as much as had been planted.

Matthew 19 says, "everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life." Believe God, leave envy behind. Don't pine for the dollars and cents of the wicked when you've got eternal gold waiting for you in heaven.

Psalm 37:17 - ¹⁷For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, But the Lord upholds the righteous.

Again we see God as a fierce protector of His people. But He not only protects, He *upholds*. The term can be defined this way: to "sustain, support, [to give] whatever is necessary."⁹ It's difficult for us to think outside of the physical, temporal life. But God promises to supply whatever is necessary for you to endure and to be effective and to continue developing as His masterpiece. He will uphold you and glorify Himself through you, not just ultimately in heaven, but through the ministry of the Holy Spirit today.

Psalm 37:18 - ¹⁸The Lord knows the days of the upright, And their inheritance shall be forever.

Just as God watches the clock of the wicked, so too He's watching the clock on our lives. He's counting down the moments until He can deliver us into our inheritance. He loves to give and is *excited* about spending eternity with us. He's planned out our forever with Him. Did you know that there is a measure of 'time' (if we can call it that) in eternity? We're told in Revelation 22 that there will be a Tree of Life that bears its fruit "every month." God wants to keep clocking the days of our delight. And He's looking forward to that moment when we're face to face with Him.

Psalm 37:19 - ¹⁹They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

The upright are those who have been made righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. They will not be disgraced or bear their guilt because of what the Lord has done for them. If you're a Christian, your guilt has been dealt with at the cross. It's done. There's no last minute disqualification. I was reading an article the other day that talked about how it's somewhat commonplace for some companies to have a *long* hiring process. The screening interview then the phone interview, then the *first* interview, a second interview, then a meal interview and a *final* interview.¹⁰ When it comes to salvation, the cross is the decider. In or out.

But what about this promise in the back half of the verse? That "in the days of famine [the upright] will be satisfied?" What are we to make of that promise? It obviously can't be talking about the

⁸ <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/04/07/waitress-gets-to-keep-12000-tip-seized-by-police/>

⁹ Dictionary Of Biblical Languages

¹⁰ <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/steps-in-the-job-interview-process-2061363>

Kingdom or eternity in Heaven, there's no famine there. Does the Bible promise that God's people won't go hungry?

We know that isn't the case Biblically or historically. So how do we respond here? Well, first of all, David writes this Psalm from a different context and, more importantly, a different *covenant* than we're under. God *had* made real, physical promises to Israel about things like wealth and supply and success if they remained faithful to Him.

When we look around today, we see that Christians do suffer immensely. Some of them are starving. A recent report concluded that persecution against Christians is at near genocide levels in parts of the world. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4, "even now we go hungry and thirsty, and we don't have enough clothes to keep warm. We are often beaten and have no home."

So what about this and other similar promises? Well, we remind ourselves that we are to put our faith in *spiritual* things, not temporal things. Paul articulated how we can be sure God will supply our *spiritual* needs, no matter what state we're in. Whether we're hungry or full, abounding or suffering, the grace of God is enough to uphold us and deliver us into His plan. The source of Christian satisfaction isn't found on a plate or in a bank account, but in a relationship with the living God. And, as we see in Psalm 37, He is a God who sees, who cares and who moves on behalf of His children.

Psalm 37:20 - ²⁰But the wicked shall perish; And the enemies of the Lord, Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away.

Before we move all the way off of verse 19, just one more thing: We recognize that verse 20 is making a promise that isn't immediate, and so we accept that the promise of verse 19 is not immediate either.

The Bible speaks a lot about the briefness of life. That it's just a vapor, a puff of smoke. God wants us to keep this mindset. It's talked about in the Old Testament, it's talked about in the New Testament. Knowing how short this life is but how *significant* our lives should be, passages like this one remind us to be keeping our mind's eye on heaven's clock, thinking through life not on the temporal level, but on the eternal level and behaving accordingly.

Tuesday, March 9, 2062. That's the day that the internet death clock says I'm going to die. So I guess I don't have to go jogging after all! It's yet another one of those clocks that our culture has produced, like the Doomsday Clock.

I don't think that's really the date, but no matter what day my life on this earth ends and my life in heaven begins, for me and for you other Christians here tonight, all it will be is the death of death, of sin, of suffering and of struggle for us. That day is not the end of our lives, it's the *beginning* of our forever life with Christ. Together we will inherit the earth, to delight in God's perfect glory and peace, in His pleasures forevermore. Our Lord is watching the clock and looking forward to that day. We can too while we faithfully and joyfully live out the life He's given us here on this earth.