

PLANT A TREE FOR GOD'S TOMORROW

PSALM 37:32-40 MAY 22, 2019

Eric Carle, the author of the classic kid's book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* has a less well-known book called *The Tiny Seed*. In it, a bunch of seeds are blowing on the wind and the tiny seed seems like it's in danger of missing out on success. Other seeds blow faster and higher. Some land on mountains. Some fly high up toward the sun. Some plant and start to grow more quickly. Though the tiny seed *does* avoid some of the dangers that other seeds fall into, it seems like it may not sprout and grow at all. Finally, it takes root and grows into the tallest, most beautiful flower anyone has ever seen. People come from far and near to take a look at this magnificent flower and enjoy its beauty.

Some of the images and themes in *The Tiny Seed* are not unlike what we find in Psalm 37. A song about the true and lasting success of a Godly life. A song about pursuing ultimate things, rather than fleeting ones. A song where we see a contrast between people who *seem* great from one perspective, but in reality are headed toward destruction.

In this wisdom Psalm, David has been speaking to us about living out day-to-day goodness, the faithfulness of God, and the glorious inheritance that's waiting for us in the life to come.

As the song comes to a close, David encourages us that, though we face attack and trouble, the best is yet to come. All will be made right again. And along the way we can find strength and shelter in the Lord, who rescues His people as He continues to lift us and grow us into beautiful examples of His grace for the world to see, like the stars in the heavens shining His glory.

We begin at verse 32.

Psalm 37:32 - ³²The wicked watches the righteous, And seeks to slay him.

In previous verses we talked about how those who are not believers are held captive by the Devil to do his will. There is a real struggle between good and evil. Satan has no plan to go quietly into the night.

Even if you're not being actively attacked tonight, we do learn something here, and that's that the unbelieving world is *observing* your life. You and I are being watched. And there are two important considerations a Christian should keep in mind in light of this knowledge.

The first is *evangelistic*. My life is being watched, so that is an opportunity to demonstrate to the world that God is *real* and He is *alive* and He actually *works* in the lives of His people. When people look at me, they should see the wonder of God and the mysteries of God. When people observe a Christian's life, the goal is that they see God's love and holiness and peace and joy, not simply someone who is somewhat more *moral* than the next guy. The goal of our Christian testimony isn't that people know all the things we're against and what we're really upset about. It's that people look at us and come to the conclusion that God actually exists and that He has the transformative power He claims to have. Jesus said the goal of our witness is that people take a look at our lives and glorify the Father in heaven because of what they see. So, consider the *evangelistic* aspect of the fact that your life is being watched.

But second, the fact that our lives are being watched means there should be an *evaluation* in our own hearts. Is that maturing righteousness that the Bible talks about *really* at work in my life? The

Bible talks about God's people being full of love and selflessness, full of generosity and forgiveness. That they're full of peace and have answers for the hardest questions of life. Is that true of me? Knowing that the world is watching and that, in Jesus' mind, we are meant to shine like a light in pitch dark, how's the lamp of my life doing?

Psalm 37:33 - ³³The Lord will not leave him in his hand, Nor condemn him when he is judged.

When it says the Lord will not do these things it means "never ever." He's a God ready to save, mighty to save. And we're reminded here that He is the *ultimate* Judge over all things. God's people may be brought into lower, earthly courts, but no matter what we can always appeal to the court of heaven and know we will be delivered. In the end, no matter what we may suffer, we won't be left in the hands of our enemies, we won't be left in the grave, we won't be left in the sway of sin. God will fully, finally rescue us out of them all.

Psalm 37:34 - ³⁴Wait on the Lord, And keep His way, And He shall exalt you to inherit the land; When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.

Waiting on the Lord means to hope with real expectation. There's a difference in how we wait for things. If you're a James Bond fan, you're maybe 'waiting' to see who will be announced as the next actor to play the character. But it has absolutely no bearing on your life. But, if you're a guest at a surprise party and you're gathered up before the person you're celebrating arrives, you wait with expectation. Because you're going to act a certain way. You *know* they're coming. You listen and you watch and you keep quiet and get ready to shout "surprise!"

To wait on the Lord is not a passive thing. It's an active hope. It's a lifestyle and pattern of behavior. The term can mean that we twist or bind together with the Lord. As we wait for His coming, we're to "keep His way." That means to carefully observe our walk with Him. We're to pay attention to our progress and our preparations for His soon return.

There's an interesting contrast here: The wicked are shown lying in wait to assault the righteous, while the righteous wait for God to arrive and move and intervene. Likewise, the wicked are shown *observing* the Godly, wanting to accuse and trap them. The Godly are told to observe their walk and make adjustments so that they are bright and shining and upright as they go.

As we walk, keeping God's way, we're told that the Lord is busy in His work of "exalting" us as we move toward our inheritance. God is a master builder and gardener. He's growing each of us and building us up, lifting us higher and getting us ready for that glorious presentation in heaven, where God will bring us with great joy into His glorious presence without a single fault. We wait for Him as He perpetually works toward that goal.

This isn't like *Waiting For Godot*, where Godot is never going to show up. Our Lord is busy getting us ready, we want to be about that business as well.

Psalm 37:35-36 - ³⁵I have seen the wicked in great power, And spreading himself like a native green tree. ³⁶Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no *more*; Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found.

The outward success of the wicked used to bother David. A number of his Psalms chronicle his talks with God about it. Now, in his old age, looking back and distilling the wisdom of a life lived following

after the Lord, he's gotten over it. And he doesn't want it to bother us either. In verses 1 and 7 of this song he says outright, "Don't worry about it." As important or imposing as some wicked people may seem, from dust they came and to dust they will return.

When we first moved into the building here, there were two sizable trees out on the grass there where the kids play soccer. They got some kind of disease, as I recall, so they had to be removed. Had you run with a soccer ball toward them back in 2003 they would've made an impression, but now? There's not so much as a bump left where they once stood. They're totally gone.

I'm guessing most of us have never heard of the richest man in history. It's not Bill Gates or Jeff Bezos, in fact, the wealth of this guy makes them seem puny. His name was Mansa Mula, ruler of the empire of Mali back in 1312. They say his fortune was "too vast to be imagined." One professor of history said this about King Mansa: "Imagine as much gold as you think a human being could possess and double it, that's what all the accounts [of Mansa Mula] are trying to communicate."¹

But what about today? This most rich man, the powerful king over an empire is gone and forgotten. He's got one more appointment left on this earth and that's before the *King* of kings at the Great White Throne judgment. There he will stand, not in pomp or power, but in guilt and ruin.

David says here that the ungodly are like a native green tree, or a tree planted in its own soil. That's an interesting image. When a person sends their roots down into their own soil, into this world, this temporal life, it comes with an expiration date. As we saw in a previous study, the clock is running down to that moment. But the Godly don't anchor themselves to *this* world. Paul said in Colossians 2 that we're to be "rooted and built up in Christ" so that our lives might be anchored onto that which is eternal. There's no expiration date on His everlasting life, no closing date for heaven. What He gives is forever and ever.

While no place will be found the wicked, there will be found for those who believe. Jesus Christ ascended into heaven so that He might prepare a *place* for you and for me.

Psalm 37:37 - ³⁷Mark the blameless *man*, and observe the upright; For the future of *that man is peace*.

Rather than focus on what's going on with the wicked in the world or comparing ourselves to them, David says, "Take a look at other righteous people." We're encouraged to watch *them* and observe their lives. To be 'blameless' simply means to be free of guilt. 'Upright' means a person who lives according to the standard set out by God. And so, David encourages us to look at the lives of Godly people. Study them. We've been furnished with many incredible specimens to examine, whether it was Paul or the other believers in the book of Acts or great men and women of God throughout the centuries. Mark them. Measure them. Observe them. Study their lives. We would all do well to regularly read the biographies of faithful Christians. Because to follow in their footsteps is to go God's way. And when we go God's way our future is "shalom." That word we translate as "peace" is a rich word. It doesn't just mean you won't be under attack, it means wholeness and completeness, to be in a state of favorable circumstances, it means to be the recipient of the friendship and affection and blessings of God.² It means to be in a prosperous relationship with the Prince of Peace. That's what's waiting when we go God's way.

¹ <https://www.history.com/news/who-was-the-richest-man-in-history-mansa-musa>

² DBL

Psalm 37:38 - ³⁸But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; The future of the wicked shall be cut off.

Those who reject Jesus Christ will die with this world. We live for the next world, a city whose Builder and Maker is God.

Psalm 37:39 - ³⁹But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in the time of trouble.

After all this talk about walking faithfully and doing good and going God's way David makes it clear that the Godly can not do this work on their own. The idea isn't that those who achieve a certain level of righteousness are recognized by God as worthy of a heavenly inheritance. It's not even that God comes down, gives us some tools to do what He wants and then leaves us to go and save ourselves or improve ourselves or 'righteous' ourselves. *SELF*-righteousness is *never* what God wants. Rather, salvation, in all its parts is *from* the Lord. Moses and Isaiah both said the Lord "has become [our] salvation." And, along the way He *is* our strength for living. "The Lord is my strength and my song."

As God works out this salvation in our lives He's also supplying and empowering us to live according to His commands. And so, especially during times of trouble, we're to turn to Him and take shelter in Him like sheep to their shepherd. Sheep don't know where to go. They don't know what to do. They need to be led. They're vulnerable and unable to protect themselves. That's why they need a shepherd, who will lead them and help them and protect them so that they can grow and be fed and find rest. The Lord is our strong, saving Shepherd, especially (David says) in times of trouble.

According to one resource, the word 'trouble' here means, "An oppressive state of physical, mental, social or economic adversity." I'd say that just about covers all the kinds of trouble we can find ourselves in. Other scholars define it as the narrow, squeezing parts of life. Or the fear associated with the onslaught of an attacking army. No matter what size or shape the storm clouds of trouble might be taking in your life, whether it's a firestorm, a snow storm, a wind storm or a dust storm, the Lord is an ever-present help and is more than adequate refuge for His people. He is the Deliverer who brings His strength and His salvation to us when we go to Him.

Psalm 37:40 - ⁴⁰And the Lord shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, And save them, Because they trust in Him.

By the end of the Psalm, David assures us that God is our future hope, our present hope, our *only* hope. In Him we find shelter and from Him we've been given a road to walk, *His* way, that leads to an everlasting inheritance in glory. As we walk with Him and keep His way He does the work of securing our steps, enriching our lives, delighting in us as we delight in Him, as He forms us and fashions us to shine like a star in the sky, that the world around us might behold His wonderful work and choose to also commit their way to Him.

Before we close, just one more thought from this Psalm. In the last 4 weeks I've pointed out how 5 times this Psalm promises that those who believe will receive an eternal inheritance from God when this life is over.

But the wicked are once again contrasted with the righteous in this regard. 5 times we're told that those who do not accept Jesus as Lord and Savior face judgement and destruction. There's no other

option, no third category. You're either saved and born again or you're not. If you're not a Christian, you're headed for judgment. You're going to perish and be cast into the Lake of Fire for all eternity. But it doesn't have to be that way. God doesn't *want* it to be that way. He made a way that you can be forgiven of your sins. Romans says, "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus says in Revelation 3 that He's standing at the door of your heart, knocking, waiting for you to let Him in. Romans 10:9 says, "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Do it tonight, before it's too late and become one of the righteous David describes in this Psalm.