

The Lord Knows, Upholds, and Saves

Psalm 37:1–40

September 20, 2026 — New Baptist Church
Pastor Trent Eastman

Introduction

We are currently in the book of Psalms, a book that covers nearly the entire history of the Old Testament in terms of prayer and praise, lament and longing. It is rightly placed among what we call the books of wisdom, for the Psalms provide guidance in walking rightly with the Lord in this world that He has created.

Last week we looked at Psalm 73, a psalm that began with its writer, Asaph, envious of the life the wicked enjoy — nearly falling into sin by convincing himself that faithfulness meant missing out on everything the wicked were enjoying. But when he went into worship among God’s people, he suddenly realized he had something the wicked did not have: the Lord Himself. And it is having the Lord that changes everything. He says in verse 25, “*Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.*” Envy and discontentment will haunt a person all the days of their life until they find contentment resting in God’s hands.

Our psalm today is Psalm 37 — notice the reversal of the numbers. This psalm is the natural outflow of what it looks like to actually live as one who has the Lord as strength and portion. It describes the life of resting in the Lord in the midst of an anxious world.

The Feeling Behind the Psalm

In Psalm 73, the human experience the psalm opened with was envy — the pain one feels because someone else possesses what one does not have. Envy is more than desire; it is turning another person’s good into a grievance.

Psalm 37 begins with a different but equally powerful human experience. The Hebrew word is *ḥārâ*) — think of the English word *charred* — which means steaming, getting hot, burning up. In our English translations, it becomes the word *fret*. This is how Psalm 37 opens: “*Fret not yourself...*” But to my ear, the word “fret” does not come close to capturing the depth of feeling the Hebrew conveys. We have all experienced what it is to feel charred — cooked,

burnt, hot. It is the feeling that comes from watching someone else receive what we believe belonged to us. Envy is wishing you had what they have; being charred is a step further. It is the feeling that what they have should be *yours*. It is what rises in us when promises are broken, when we are taken advantage of, when someone receives what we deserved, or when people cheat and cut corners and end up getting rewarded for it while those who follow the rules go unnoticed. It is the feeling we carry in those moments when the unfairness of life just makes us angry. It is not fair.

The psalm is ascribed to David, and David himself tells us he is old when he wrote it: “*I have been young, and now am old*” (v. 25). No specific context is given in the text, but one that fits remarkably well is the moment when David’s son Adonijah sought to make himself king. As we read in 1 Kings 1:5–10, David is old, and Adonijah moves to claim the throne — throwing himself a parade with chariots and horses, followed by a coronation party attended by the royal officials of Judah, including General Joab and Abiathar the high priest. There was just one problem: King David had already promised that the kingdom would go to Solomon, the son of Bathsheba. Solomon was to inherit the land. Can you imagine what Solomon must have felt when his brother was parading through the streets and throwing a coronation party after the crown had already been promised to him? He would have been incensed, inflamed, seething with the injustice of it. That is precisely the feeling described by _____.

It is not hard, then, to imagine David writing these words as instruction to Solomon. This is where Psalm 37 begins:

Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. (vv. 1–2)

Don’t get heated over something that is going to burn up anyway. And rather than getting hot, here is what to do instead:

Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him. (vv. 3–7)

These verses describe what lived faithfulness looks like in a world that is often unfair and unjust. Instead of fretting — getting hot, agitated, anxious over what others are doing or the sense that life is simply not fair — God’s Word calls us to something else entirely. Let’s walk through this passage and hear its wisdom.

Six Postures of Faith in an Unjust World

Trust in the LORD. In this context, trust means refusing to make an evildoer's visible success the measure of God's goodness or justice. The injustice we see around us, as upsetting as it is, does not mean God is unjust. In the face of evil, we continue to trust in His goodness.

And do good. When we have been wronged, we tend to focus on what the other person did or what they ought to do. But we cannot control other people. And there is something within us, when we are wronged, that wants to respond in kind — *if they are going to treat me that way, I will treat them the same way*. David is pushing back against this. He is saying: do not allow someone else's sin to determine your character. Rather, do good.

Dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. I love that phrase. It means to stay where God has planted you and cultivate a faithful life. Serve where you are. Love the people before you. Keep doing those ordinary acts of obedience again and again, even when you feel unnoticed and unrewarded.

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Delighting in the Lord is itself a form of trust, because trusting the Lord means finding your happiness, your deepest contentment, your deepest joy in Him. He is what the soul truly longs for, and when your heart delights in Him, it has found its desire. This verse has unfortunately been corrupted by bad theology that tries to turn God into a vending machine for our wishes — which is, in fact, the very antithesis of what this psalm is teaching. Do not fret over the things of this world that do not last. Desire that which will never fade.

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. It is so easy to feel slighted, burned, overlooked, ignored, even insulted. A person does something good, and instead of being appreciated, the effort gets what feels like being spat upon — unnoticed, unthanked. And when those feelings boil over, they cause the heated person to say, *I quit. I am not doing that anymore*. We have all been there, especially if you have ever volunteered for anything. We all carry expectations of what we deserve for the good we do, and when those expectations go unmet, we can get heated. So what David says in verses 5 and 6 is crucial. Commit your way to the Lord. What you are doing, you are doing for Him. And if you are doing it for Him rather than for yourself, you can trust Him to know what you are doing. Pleasing Him is so much greater than any recognition this world can give: *He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday*.

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him. One of the great biblical examples of waiting is David himself. He was around fifteen years old when Samuel anointed him king. He did not take the throne until he was thirty — and those fifteen years of waiting involved being hunted by Saul while, at the same time, having easy opportunities to kill him. But David stayed his hand. Why? Because he was waiting for God to do what God had promised. He waited, and it was not easy, but the Lord is faithful to what He has promised. Sometimes we need to preach

to ourselves the words of Moses at the Red Sea, when the people of Israel fretted over the approaching Egyptians:

“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today... The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” (Exodus 14:13–14)

Being still and waiting for the Lord gives us the eyes to see the redeeming work of God.

Eight Reasons Not to Fret

From this point forward in the psalm, these instructions are repeated and supported. Why do good when you have been wronged? Why remain faithful when others are cutting corners? Why trust the Lord when you feel so hot and upset? The psalm gives us reasons. We do not have time to work through every verse, so what follows is not exhaustive — these are simply the ones that speak most clearly.

First, fretting tends to evil. Reading on in verses 7–8:

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. (vv. 7–8)

Hear the warning. If you allow yourself to get heated, to boil over, to seethe with anger, you become like the one who does evil. *Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.* And so again, the wisdom of this psalm: do not allow someone else’s sin to determine your character.

Second, the meek shall inherit the covenant promises of God.

For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land. 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. (vv. 9–11)

What an amazing promise. The phrase *inherit the land* is a loaded covenant phrase. It reaches all the way back to Abraham — a promise received by faith. If this is a psalm David wrote for Solomon, he is telling his son that the covenant promises of the Lord come to those who wait and trust. And in the New Covenant, that promise is not diminished but enlarged. In Christ, the inheritance promised to God’s people opens into the fullness of God’s kingdom and ultimately

into the new creation. And already in Christ we possess the first fruits of that inheritance: forgiveness, the Spirit, adoption, righteousness, and eternal life.

Third, the Lord holds you up.

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 sword 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. (vv. 12–17)

Notice what David describes: the wicked plot, gnash their teeth, draw the sword, and bend the bow — and yet the Lord laughs. He does not laugh because evil is funny. He laughs because He sees that the wicked's day is coming and He is not threatened by them. And if He is not threatened, neither do we need to be. In a world that feels so unsafe, the Lord holds those who are His secure.

Fourth, the Lord knows what you are going through.

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. (vv. 18–20)

Please hear what David is saying. You do not need to keep score. God already sees the whole story. One of the reasons we fret is that we think somebody has to notice — *they are getting away with it!* Somebody has to make sure justice is done. And very often we decide that person has to be us. So we rehearse the offense. We replay the conversation. We imagine what we should have said. We tell the story again to someone else. We secretly hope the person who wronged us will fail. Why? Because we are afraid that if we stop holding onto the offense, justice will somehow disappear. But David says: *The LORD knows the days of the blameless.* He knows. He knows what happened. He knows what was said. He knows what was taken. He knows what was unfair. He knows what nobody else knows. And because God knows, you can release your need to keep carrying the case. When we fret, when we worry, when we get hot, we are occupying the place that faith is meant to entrust to God.

Fifth, the Lord holds your hand.

The wicked borrows but does not pay back, 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 am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing. Turn away from evil and do good; so shall you dwell forever. (vv. 21–27)

In this comparison between the wicked and the righteous, we hear again the wisdom that when a person focuses upon what the wicked are doing, it shapes the kind of person he or she is becoming. So do not let somebody else's sin decide what kind of person you will be. If they lie, you still tell the truth. If they are cruel, you remain kind. If they are selfish, you remain generous. If they betray you, you remain faithful. Why? Because your character belongs to God, not to them. Someone else does not get to determine whether you will be faithful.

I love verses 23 and 24 especially. *The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way.* Not the leaps. Not the great victories. Steps. Most of the life of faith is made up of daily steps of delighting in God. *Though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong* — I love that — *for the LORD upholds his hand.*

Sixth, the Lord will not forsake you.

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. (vv. 28–31)

He will not forsake His saints. Which means that if you are in Him, He will never turn His back on you, never forget you, never overlook you. You will ever be before Him, His covenant promises being fulfilled in you, and His hand holding you.

Seventh, the Lord has a future for you.

The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death. 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. (vv. 32–37)

The person who frets lives as though everything depends upon this moment. The insult, the disappointment, the loss must be dealt with *now*. But those of faith can wait upon the Lord because they know He holds the future. There is another day, another chapter, another part of the story that we cannot yet see. The person who wronged you does not control your future. The disappointment you experienced does not define your future. This present moment is not the end of your story. *For there is a future for the man of peace.*

Eighth, the Lord saves. He is your refuge.

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 the 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. (vv. 38–40)

David ends the psalm by bringing us back to the Lord Himself. Our salvation is not found in finally getting even, in proving ourselves right, or in seeing the wicked get what they deserve. *The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD.* He is our stronghold when trouble comes, our deliverer when we are stuck, our refuge when life becomes overwhelming. The final answer to a fretting heart is not greater control — it is taking refuge in the Lord.

The Christ Who Lived This Psalm

Some of you may have come in this morning burning, fretting, upset, worried. Maybe that fretting is over a promise that was broken, a credit that was taken, or someone who did wrong and seems to be doing just fine. Hear this: the Lord knows.

I have preached this psalm as though we are always the ones who have been wronged. But we all know we are also the people who have wronged others. Yes, we have been charred by what others have done to us — but we have also been the ones who have wronged, taken advantage of, and broken our word. On our own, we have no claim upon the inheritance, no claim upon the covenant promises of the Lord.

And this is where Psalm 37 leads us to Jesus.

David says, “*The meek shall inherit the land.*” And centuries later, Jesus will speak this very psalm in what we know as the Sermon on the Mount: “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5:5). There is only one who is truly meek, and it is Jesus.

No one was ever treated more unjustly than He was. He was betrayed, falsely accused, mocked, beaten, and crucified. If anyone had the right to burn with anger, to strike back, to demand

immediate justice, it was Jesus. And yet, as Peter tells us, *“when he was reviled, he did not revile in return... but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly”* (1 Peter 2:23).

Jesus lived Psalm 37 perfectly. He trusted the Father. He continued to do good. He committed His way to the Lord. He waited upon the Father. He entrusted justice to God. And then, at the cross, the truly righteous One was cut off for the unrighteous. He bore our sin, our anger, our retaliation, our injustice. And God raised Him from the dead.

So when Jesus says, *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,”* He is not merely telling us what kind of people we ought to become. He is telling us what becomes ours when we belong to Him. The inheritance belongs to Christ, and by grace through faith, we share in His inheritance.

So bring your anger to Him. Bring your disappointment to Him. Bring your sense of injustice to Him. Bring your sin to Him. And trust the One who was crucified and raised again.

All the things that fretting tries to do — you do not have to do. You do not have to hold the whole world together. You do not have to make everything right. You do not have to control the future. Why? Because you have Jesus. And if you have Jesus, you have the One who knows you, holds you, will never forsake you, has secured your future, and will bring you safely home.

The meek shall inherit the earth — not because they seized it, but because in Christ it has been given to them.

Amen.