

Psalm 37: Trust in the Lord and do good



Psalm 37 (36) (Mode 2. 5....31 / 4.....32)

This is a manifesto on how to live in an unjust world. Like Psalm 9-10, Psalm 25, and Psalm 34, this is an acrostic psalm.

The psalmist calls on his age and experience (verses 25,3 5) to contrast two groups of people and God's judgment on their lives.

Through greed, neglect, natural conditions and historical events (including war), the psalmist finds himself in a society in which some have grown rich at the expense of others. How are the dispossessed to act, and in what kind of project are those concerned for the dispossessed to be involved? Where is God in all this and how are people to do God's will? The psalm is a call not to lose heart when the irreligious seem to prosper, but to continue to trust in God and to wait upon God's grace. Justice will prevail.

The psalm begins with an urgent plea to look to the Lord (37:1-8)

[N]Do not fret because people act badly;
do not envy those who do wrong.

Later in the psalm ‘wrongdoers’ are described:

They are ‘irreligious’; they ‘plot against the just’;
they are not blessed by Yahweh.

They ‘live in opulence’; they ‘prosper’; they tower
over other people like a luxuriant cedar’.

‘They will fade and wither’ ; ‘they will be no more’;
‘their day of retribution is coming’; ‘their sword shall
enter their own heart’; ‘they will perish - vanish’; ‘they
will be cut off’; ‘they will be no more’; ‘they will be
altogether destroyed’.

They wither quickly like grass,
and fade like the green of the fields.

Note the imagery of vegetation, consistent with the theme of possessing the land:

‘They are not put to shame in evil times (= bad seasons)’(verse 19).

‘The enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures – they vanish’(verse 20).

‘Their children (= seed)’ (verse 25).

‘Their children (= shoot)’ (verse 28).

‘Towering like a luxuriant cedar’(verse 35).

[ב] Trust in the Lord, and do good

Later descriptions of those who
'trust in the Lord and do good'

They cultivate faithfulness;
they commit their life's journey to the Lord;
they rest in the Lord and hope in him;
they are meek; poor and needy and walk uprightly;
they are generous and keep giving;
they are blessed by the Lord;
they are ever giving liberally and lending; they are just;
they hope in the Lord and keep to his way;
they are people of peace.

Cultivate faithfulness and settle in the land.

Let the Lord be your delight.

God will give you what your heart is seeking.

The Lord will act on their behalf; they will inherit the land; they will enjoy abundant peace and prosperity; are better off in having little; the Lord upholds them; their heritage will last for ever; they will have abundance; they will not lack bread; they will always have a home; they will dwell in the land for ever; they will experience salvation and liberation from the Lord.

‘The meek shall inherit the land, and enjoy abundant prosperity’; ‘their heritage will last forever’; ‘In the days of famine they have abundance’; ‘I have not seen the just forsaken or their children begging bread’; ‘Their children become a blessing’; ‘You shall always have a home’; ‘The just shall inherit the land, and live in it forever’; ‘There is posterity for the peaceable’.

The just are to remain in solidarity with others in need:

‘If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbour. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and therefore view your needy neighbour with hostility and give nothing; your neighbour might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake’(Deuteronomy 15:7-10).

Sirach 29:1-13

‘The merciful lend to their neighbours; by holding out a helping hand they keep the commandments. Lend to your neighbour in his time of need; repay your neighbour when a loan falls due. Keep your promise and be honest with him, and on every occasion you will find what you need ... Many refuse to lend, not because of meanness, but from fear of being defrauded needlessly

Sirach 29:1-13 (continued)

‘Nevertheless, be patient with someone in humble circumstances, and do not keep him waiting for your alms. Help the poor for the commandment’s sake, and in their need do not send them away empty-handed. Lose your silver for the sake of a brother or a friend, and do not let it rust under a stone and be lost. Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High, and it will profit you more than gold. Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it will rescue you from every disaster; better than a stout shield and a sturdy spear, it will fight for you against the enemy.’

[א] Commit your life to the Lord.

Trust God to act on your behalf.

God will make your justice

shine forth like the dawn,

your judgments like the sun at noon.

[ט] Rest in the Lord. Hope in your God.

Do not fret over those who prosper
as they carry out their evil schemes.

‘Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth’(Psalm 46:10).

‘For God alone my soul waits in silence’(Psalm 62:1).

‘For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him’(Psalm 62:5).

[ה] Restrain your anger. Control your rage.

Fretting leads only to evil.

The wicked will be cut off from the people.

Those who wait for the Lord will inherit the land.

[ו] Wait a short while and the irreligious will have gone.

Search them out. They are nowhere to be found.

It is the meek who will inherit the land,
and enjoy abundant prosperity.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.’

(Matthew 5:5)

{٢} The wicked plot against the just,
and gnash their teeth.

The Lord is laughing at them,
knowing that their end is near.

{٢} The wicked unsheathe the sword
and draw the bow
to bring down the poor and needy,
to kill those who live upright lives.

Their sword will enter their own heart,
their bow will be broken.

[٧] Better the few things owned by the just
than to be wealthy and do evil.

The power of the wicked will be broken,
but the Lord sustains the just.

‘Better is a little with the fear of the Lord
than great treasure and trouble with it’(Proverbs 15:16).

‘Better is a little with righteousness than large income
with injustice’(Proverbs 16:8).

‘A little righteousness is better than wealth with
wrongdoing’(Tobit 12:8).

[᾿]The Lord watches over the lives of the blameless;
their heritage will go on for ever.

‘Fight to the death for truth
and the Lord God will fight for you’(Sirach 4:28).

‘Those who believe in me, even though they die,
shall live’(John 11:25).

They are not put to shame
in evil times.

[٥] In the days of famine they have all they need.

The enemies of the Lord will perish.

They will pass away like the flowers,
vanish like smoke.

[5]The wicked borrow, and do not repay.

The just are generous and keep giving.

Is the psalmist saying that the wicked do not pay back because they have come upon hard times (God's punishment for sin); whereas the just have been blessed with abundance and can repay their debts with plenty left over? Or is he saying that the wicked are rich because they take and do not return; whereas the poor are poor but generous?

Those blessed by the Lord will inherit the land.

Those declared evil by God will be destroyed.

[7] The Lord makes our steps secure.

We journey through life held in God's heart.

We might stumble, but we will not fall,

for the Lord is holding us by the hand.

‘I know, Lord, that the way of human beings is not in their control, that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps’(Jeremiah 10:23).

‘The human mind plans the way,
but the Lord directs the steps’(Proverbs 16:9).

‘All our steps are ordered by the Lord; how then can we understand our own ways?’(Proverbs 20:24).

[D] I have been young, and now am old,
and I have never seen the just forsaken
or their children begging.

They are always giving liberally and lending,
and their children will be blessed.

[D] Avoid evil, and do good,
and you will always have a home.

For the Lord loves justice,
and will not forsake the faithful.

The Psalmist is encouraging his contemporaries
to trusting abandonment to divine providence.

[V] The irreligious are destroyed;
their children cut off from the people.

[Q] The just will inherit the land,
and live in it for ever.

The just utter wisdom,
the judgments they pronounce are true.
They carry the law of God in their hearts.
They do not falter.

‘Listen to me, you who know righteousness, you
people who have my law in your hearts’(Isaiah 51:7).

‘I will put my law within them, and I will write it on
their hearts’(Jeremiah 31:33).

[כז] The wicked watch for the just,
seeking to kill them.

The Lord will not abandon the just to their power,
or let them be condemned
when they are brought to trial.

[כח] Hope in the Lord
Keep to God's way.

The Lord will raise you up to inherit the land,
and you will see the irreligious destroyed.

[כט] I have seen the wicked puffed up with pride,
towering like a luxuriant cedar.

I passed by again, and they were no more.

I searched for them but they were no more, and their place was overgrown with weeds.

[ש] Observe the blameless, keep your eyes on the upright.
Prosperity is for the peacemakers.
Transgressors will be altogether destroyed.
There is no future for those
who cut themselves off from God.

[ת] The deliverance of the just comes from the Lord,
their refuge in time of trouble.
The Lord rescues them from the wicked,
rescues and saves them.

The beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10)

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

2. Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

The wicked bring down the poor and needy.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

The meek shall inherit the land

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice,
for they will be filled.

a recurring theme throughout the psalm.

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

The just are generous and keep giving.

They are ever giving liberally and lending

6. Blessed are the pure in heart, they will see God.

7. Blessed are the peacemakers, they will be called children of God.

There is posterity for the peaceable.

8. Blessed are those who are persecuted because they are just, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

a recurring theme throughout the psalm.