

Message #38

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Life of David

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## LIFE LESSONS FROM DAVID

### PSALM 37

#### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Martin was born and raised in Atlanta. He came from a strong Christian family. He did very well in school, and when he finished high school, he went to college in Atlanta. Later he went north for graduate school. He won a number of academic awards, and eventually he earned a Ph.D. from Boston University.

Instead of pursuing a career in the realm of academia, he returned to the South. Before long he got into trouble with the law. He was arrested a number of times. In fact, in the next several years he was arrested thirty times. But despite what that arrest record might suggest, Martin really wanted to do what was right. He was trying to follow God and do God's will. He was serving even as a pastor.

But Martin Luther King (PROJECTOR ON--- MARTIN LUTHER KING) found himself acting as the head of a group of black pastors that was trying to confront a racist society in the deep South which treated blacks as second class citizens, or not even as citizens at all. Trying to change that mindset led to considerable conflict. Martin Luther King faced some evil people. How would he handle the situation? (PROJECTOR OFF)

Most of us have never had such dramatic confrontations with evil and with people who want us dead, although some of us who have served in the military have had that experience. Today we do live in a society whose values often run counter to Biblical values. Even our support of traditional marriage is becoming countercultural. We also encounter people in every day life who are out for themselves, who are willing to hurt others to get their way, who will use any method at their disposal to do that. Some of these people seem to prosper. At times we are tempted to buy into their methodology--- to fight fire with fire--- and to adopt their same priorities. The Psalm before us today tells us how we should respond to this kind of challenge.

In our study of the life of David we came to his earthly end last week as it was described to us in the first two chapters of 1 Kings. One of the great contributions which David has left to us is many of the Psalms. We looked briefly at Psalm 23 in an earlier study. As a way to wrap up this message series I thought that it might be appropriate to conclude with a look at another one of his Psalms--- a Psalm which provides, as well as any other of his Psalms, life lessons that might have value for us. Psalm 37 is classified by the scholars as a Psalm of wisdom. It bears similarities to the kind of literature which we find in the Book of Proverbs. It deals with general principles of wise living.

It is also what is called "an acrostic psalm." This and several other Psalms, along with a couple of other passages in the Old Testament, have verses that begin with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first word of v. 1 of our Psalm begins with the Hebrew counterpart to the letter A. The third verse begins with a word that starts with a letter that corresponds to our letter B, and so it goes with pretty much every other verse in Psalm 37.

I.

The wisdom Psalms are somewhat difficult to analyze in terms of an outline. But I have organized Psalm 37 around several general themes. So let's look first at vv. 1-8 under the heading GET YOUR EYES OFF OF THE WICKED AND ONTO GOD. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. GET YOUR EYES OFF OF...)

David is identified as the author in the superscription, or preface. He writes, "**Fret not yourself because of evildoers;/ be not envious of wrongdoers! 2 For they will soon fade like the grass/ and wither like the green herb./ 3 Trust in the Lord, and do good;/ dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness./ 4 Delight yourself in the Lord,/ and he will give you the desires of your heart./ 5 Commit your way to the Lord;/ trust in him, and he will act./ 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light,/ and your justice as the noonday./ 7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;/ fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,/ over the man who carries out evil devices!/ 8 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!/ Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.**"

The difficulty which David envisions is placing our focus upon the situation of evildoers. Verse 1 warns us about envy. Verse 8 speaks about focusing on the wicked who prosper. Sometimes it seems like bad people do well in life. They don't follow God's laws and principles, but they seem to be better off than we are. Why is it that the evil prosper and the righteous suffer?

For several years--- perhaps ten years--- David was on the run from King Saul. King Saul knew from the prophet Samuel that his disobedience to God had caused him to be out of favor with the Lord. He was suspicious that David was his divinely intended replacement, and he was right. David had been faithful as a court musician and as a general under Saul. He had represented his nation and his army and his king in killing the Philistine giant Goliath. But the king kept chasing David and trying to kill him. David lived in caves and out in the open. Saul lived in a palace. Saul was living in disobedience to God. David was staying faithful.

In this kind of situation the follower of God faces three temptations. **First**, there is the temptation to stop following God and lower our ethical standards. King Saul is trying to kill me. I am going to try to kill him. You have to fight fire with fire.

There are people at work who pad their expense accounts, who lie on their time cards, who get to work late and leave early, who kiss up to the boss, who play office politics, and who seem to be successful. They seem to do fine. At school there are kids who cheat on their tests, who get papers off of the Internet, and they get better grades than I do. The temptation is to forget God and use their methods.

The **second** temptation is to get mad. Verse 8 makes reference to the reaction of anger. Some followers of God won't give up their ethical standards, but they will get really angry. They will become consumed with it. "Life just isn't fair. I have served my country and my king, and Saul is trying to kill me." "I put in extra hours at work and save the company a lot of money, and now they are laying me off in the midst of this pandemic." "I pay my taxes on time, and yet the stupid state of Nevada has still not given me the unemployment to which I am entitled."

We get angry with people, and we get angry with God. God isn't being fair to me. I am trying to follow Him, and look where it gets me. We take out our anger on our mate, on our kids, on our parents and on other people. We become a negative and angry person.

The **third** temptation is worry. Three times David speaks about fretting. In v. 1 he says, "**Do not fret because of evildoers...**" In the second line of v. 7 he says, "**Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way...**" In the second line of v. 8 he says, "**Do not fret...**"

The literal meaning of the original Hebrew verb is “get heated up.” David is encouraging people not to get heated up over evildoers. Our concern is that evil may prevail. We may lose out. We may get hurt. We may be left alone.

The proper response is to trust in God. We are to delight ourselves in the Lord, as v. 4 says. We are to commit our way to Him, as v. 5 says. The promise is that He will give us the desires of our heart. We may think that our desire is to have a new car or a certain job or more money or a boyfriend or our team to win the World Series. I would argue that all of these things are merely symptoms of a deeper desire. What we really want in life is security and significance. What we want is to know that our future will be good and that our needs will be met. We want to know that we are somebody--- that we have some significance and purpose and meaning in this life. Those deepest desires are met only in a relationship with the God who is really there. He promises us eternal security, and He promises us membership in His family and a significant position in His kingdom.

A conviction that this is true means that we are to give our worries and doubts and feelings of anger and injustice to God. We have to remember good theology. God is sovereign, and He cares for those who trust in Him. Verse 7 says that we have to wait patiently for Him to act.

French philosopher and Christian Blaise Pascal said that the basic thing wrong with the world is that man **“does not know how to stay in his own room.”** We want to take over the bridge of the ship. We want to take the helm. We want to move into the office of the CEO. We want to be in charge. But if we believe that God is sovereign and that He cares, we have to get our eyes off of the wicked and on to Him. We have to trust Him with the situation. We need to allow Him to be in charge.

After Martin Luther King got his Ph.D., he moved to Alabama and became pastor of a Baptist church in Montgomery. One day a black woman by the name of Rosa Parks (PROJECTOR ON--- ROSA PARKS) refused to move to the back of a city bus. She was arrested for breaking the city’s laws concerning segregation of the races. The black pastors decided to do something about it. They formed an organization to complain about this blatant racism. (PROJECTOR OFF) To head up the group they decided to talk the new minister in town into taking what could be a thankless job. He took the position. A couple days after that was announced Dr. King was arrested for driving 30 miles an hour in a 25 mile an hour zone. He was put in jail for it.

After he got out of jail, he went home. That evening he got a phone call. The voice on the other end of the line said, **“N..., we are tired of you and your mess now. And if you aren’t out of this town in three days, we’re going to blow your brains out, and blow up your house.”**

Martin Luther King did some hard thinking that night. He had a wife and baby girl to consider. He later said, **“I sat at that table thinking about that little girl and thinking about the fact that she could be taken away from me any minute. And I started thinking about a dedicated, devoted and loyal wife, who was over there asleep.... And I got to the point that I couldn’t take it anymore. I was weak... And I discovered then that religion had to become real to me, and I had to know God for myself. And I bowed down over that cup of coffee. I never will forget it.... I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night. I said, ‘Lord, I’m down here trying to do what’s right. I think I’m right. I think the cause that we represent is right. But Lord, I must confess that I’m weak now. I’m faltering. I’m losing my courage.’ ...And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, ‘Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world.’ ...I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No never alone.”** That night he got his eyes off of the wicked and onto God.

II.

In vv. 9-22 we are reminded to REMEMBER THE FATE OF THE WICKED. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. REMEMBER THE FATE OF THE WICKED) In vv. 9-11 David writes, **“For the evildoers shall be cut off,/ but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land./ 10 In just a little while, the wicked will be no more;/ though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there./ 11 But the meek shall inherit the land/ and delight themselves in abundant peace..”**

To Old Testament believers possessing the promised land was a big deal. The Lord saw to it that the promised land was divided up among the twelve tribes of Israel. Then it was divided within those tribes among the various families. A primary challenge for David’s foreign policy as king was occupying and defending that promised land. The Philistines were longtime enemies who threatened that territorial promise. There were other enemy nations surrounding Israel with whom David had to deal as king. The assurance here is that in the end the humble will get at least their share.

In the Sermon on the Mount (MATTHEW 5:5) in Matthew #5 v. 5 Jesus told His followers, **“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”** The ultimate fulfillment of that promise comes when Jesus returns. The assurance is that His people, the gentle and meek, will have a special position in the

kingdom that He establishes upon the earth. (PROJECTOR OFF) Such it was that Martin Luther King insisted upon using nonviolent methods to achieve his goals.

In our passage David is saying that the wicked won't get the land in the end. They may prosper for a while, but ultimately they must face God. Judgment will come--- either in this life or the life to come.

David continues in vv. 12-15, **“The wicked plots against the righteous/ and gnashes his teeth at him,/ 13 but the Lord laughs at the wicked,/ for he sees that his day is coming./ 14 The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows/ to bring down the poor and needy,/ to slay those whose way is upright;/ 15 their sword shall enter their own heart,/ and their bows shall be broken.”**

In Psalm 2 (PROJECTOR ON--- PSALM 2:2) God laughs at the nations hostile toward Israel. In vv. 2-4 we read, **“The kings of the earth set themselves,/ and the rulers take counsel together,/ against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying,/ (PSALM 2:3-4) 3 ‘Let us burst their bonds apart/ and cast away their cords from us./ 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs;/ the Lord holds them in derision.”** The nations hostile toward Israel make their plans, but God laughs at them. It is the laugh of scorn. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In Psalm 37 the situation involves the righteous who are the targets of the plotting of individuals who are characterized as wicked. The sovereign God will protect His people. Eventually the evil people may be done in by their own conduct. So it was that David's son Absalom had his rebellion end abruptly when his hair, which was a source of pride for him, got caught in a tree, and he was done in by General Joab.

In the generation of some of us Nikita Khrushchev (PROJECTOR ON--- KHRUSCHEV AND BENSON) vowed to American Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson that his grandchildren would be under Communist rule. In the end it was Khrushchev's son Sergei who moved to the United States in 1991 to enjoy freedom. In 1999 he became an American citizen. Communism in the Soviet Union did itself in. It fell under the weight of its own corruption. (PROJECTOR OFF)

According to vv. 16-22, **“Better is the little that the righteous has/ than the abundance of many wicked./ 17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,/ but the Lord upholds the righteous./ 18 The Lord knows the days of the blameless,/ and their heritage will remain forever;/ 19 they are not put to shame in evil times;/ in the days of famine they have abundance./ 20 But the wicked will perish;/ the enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures;/ they vanish—like smoke they vanish away./ 21**

**The wicked borrows but does not pay back,/ but the righteous is generous and gives;/ 22 for those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land,/ but those cursed by him shall be cut off.”**

When David was on the run, King Saul had much and David got along with little. When David’s son Absalom forced David to flee from Jerusalem, the king could take little with him. But in both cases the wicked were killed. David ended up in the palace. God sustains the righteous and judges the wicked in the end.

When Martin Luther King found himself leading an effort to confront the evils of racism and segregation in the South, he encountered many wicked people. He was thrown in jail. He was beaten. He received death threats. He was stabbed. His house was bombed. Government officials threw him in jail time and time again.

But in the end the arms of the wicked were broken. African-Americans were eventually elected to offices that were once held by white segregationists. Laws were changed. Ku Klux Klan members went to jail. In 1994 the man who murdered civil rights worker Medgar Evers over thirty years earlier went to prison for the rest of his life.

Governor George Wallace, who once stood in the doorway of the University of Alabama to keep two black students from entering, was discredited. He himself was shot by one who tried to assassinate him. Eventually he was born again and repented of his sin. He asked forgiveness of black leaders he once opposed.

When we are confronted with evil people, we need to remember the fate of the wicked. The sovereign and just God who cares for us will eventually see that the wicked are dealt with. Sometimes He sees to it that it happens in our lifetimes. Always He deals with them on the other side of the grave. Thus we need to get our eyes off of the wicked and onto God.

III.

Next, in vv. 23-34, the Psalmist reminds his readers to REMEMBER THE BLESSINGS ON THE RIGHTEOUS. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. REMEMBER THE BLESSINGS...) He says in vv. 23-26, **“The steps of a man are established by the Lord,/ when he delights in his way;/ 24 though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong,/ for the Lord upholds his hand./ 25 I have been young, and now am old,/ yet I have not**

**seen the righteous forsaken/ or his children begging for bread./ 26 He is ever lending generously,/ and his children become a blessing.”**

We learn from this that David was an old man when he penned these words. He was sharing his experiences from the perspective of a mature elder statesman. David had surely stumbled and fallen. He had done some very bad things. He was guilty of adultery and murder. But he repented of those sins and was restored.

Martin Luther King also was guilty of some bad things. He was involved in immorality with a number of women. That was a major blot on his legacy. It turns out that he was also guilty of plagiarism on his doctoral dissertation, which is somewhat hard to understand when he was such an eloquent person. These things were wrong, and caused him to lose credibility and respect. Yet King refused to resort to violence and sought to base the principles of the civil rights movement on the Scriptures, and he and the movement were blessed because of that.

The basic way that David sees here that God blesses the righteous is that he provides for them materially. In his experience the righteous had not gone begging bread. In his experience as a refugee in the wilderness he and his band of supporters always found enough to eat. God provides what is needed for His children. They in turn give and are a blessing to others. For righteousness is characterized by generosity.

David continues in vv. 27-34, **“Turn away from evil and do good;/ so shall you dwell forever.**

**28 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./ 29 The righteous shall inherit the land/ and dwell upon it forever./ 30 The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom,/ and his tongue speaks justice. 31 The law of his God is in his heart;/ his steps do not slip./ 32 The wicked watches for the righteous/ and seeks to put him to death./ 33 The Lord will not abandon him to his power/ or let him be condemned when he is brought to trial./ 34 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.”**

Notice again the value placed upon possessing the land. That has been a concern for the people of Israel for much of their history. Still today we see fighting going on over who has the right to possess the land of Israel. David says that it is the righteous who will inherit it.

The primary encouragement to the people of God is that if we do good and depart from evil, we will abide forever. David assures us that God will not forsake His people. He will preserve them forever. We may die physically, but we have the promise of eternal life with Him in heaven. God will bless the righteous.

Many of those who were involved in leading the Civil Rights Movement in the 60s suffered a lot. Many of them, like Martin Luther King, were truly Christians. In the end they saw the blessing of God. Justice won out. Laws in the South were changed. The Civil Rights Act was signed into law in 1964. A year later the Voting Rights Act was signed into law, assuring African-Americans that their right to vote would be protected by the federal government.

Blacks were elected to office. The culture of racism changed. Racial prejudice has certainly not been eliminated, but conditions are much better than they once were. This movement for change originated in the churches. Because of that and because it was a just cause and because they based their movement on their understanding of the Scriptures, God blessed it. His blessing will likewise be upon us when we commit our way to Him and do what is right.

IV.

Finally, from vv. 35-40, we need to REMEMBER THAT SALVATION COMES FROM THE LORD. (IV. REMEMBER THAT SALVATION COMES...) In v. 35 David writes, “**I have seen a wicked, ruthless man,/ spreading himself like a green laurel tree.**”

David is saying that he has seen bad people who seemingly flourish. They become wealthy and powerful and successful. Perhaps he was thinking of Nabal or Saul or some of the enemy kings around Israel. His own son Absalom also fit into this category.

But he adds in v. 36, “**But he passed away, and behold, he was no more;/ though I sought him, he could not be found.**” These bad people may have flourished for a while, but in the end they went away. They died. They were not missed.

Verse 37: “**Mark the blameless and behold the upright,/ for there is a future for the man of peace.**” The good man will leave a positive legacy. He will leave good things behind.

Then in vv. 38-40 David concludes, **“But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed;/ the future of the wicked shall be cut off./ 39 The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord;/ he is their stronghold in the time of trouble./ 40 The Lord helps them and delivers them;/ he delivers them from the wicked and saves them,/ because they take refuge in him.”**

Salvation, deliverance, in David’s mind is ultimately a God thing. It comes from the Lord. Our responsibility is to trust in Him. That is the story of the Gospel. God sent His Son to become a human being and to die on the cross in our place. He paid the penalty for our sins. Our responsibility is to trust in Jesus, to receive Him as our personal Savior. When we do that, we experience salvation from sin and judgment.

Salvation from our earthly difficulties is also a God thing. Martin Luther King had a genuine faith in Christ that recognized this truth. He refused to respond to violence with violence. There were some with a connection to the Civil Rights Movement who couldn’t handle that kind of response. They got involved with groups like the Black Panthers, which used violent means. Today it is Antifa and some elements of the Black Lives Matter movements which see no problem with violence.

Martin Luther King wouldn’t do that, and his influence prevailed. In spite of his personal failings he sought to base the direction of the movement in the Bible. He determined to trust God for the results.

Some historians point to one incident that turned the tide in public opinion toward the cause of civil rights. (SELMA MARCH) On March 7, 1965, there was a protest march led by civil rights leaders that set out from Selma, Alabama, to go to the capital in Montgomery. The route they followed took them to a bridge. (SELMA MARCH 2) When the unarmed black demonstrators reached this bridge just outside of town, the sheriff met them with a large force of police officers. The mounted troopers were sent into the midst of the demonstrators with their nightsticks swinging. (SELMA MARCH 3) Blood flowed and people fell to the ground. Whites on the sidelines whooped and cheered. Tear gas was shot into the midst of this mayhem. (SELMA MARCH 4)

That night ABC was showing the movie *Judgment at Nuremberg*. It was the story of the trial of the Nazis who had committed war crimes and atrocities against the Jews. This showing was at a time before cable TV was available. So there was a large audience of people from across the country who were watching this movie about judgment for those responsible for the Holocaust. In the middle of the film ABC cut away to a news bulletin to show what was happening outside of Selma, Alabama. Millions of Americans were suddenly exposed to the sight of scores of unarmed, peaceful black demonstrators being beaten

by uniformed officers who bore a striking resemblance to the Nazis in the movie that they had just been watching. The timing was a God thing.

A renewed march held later finally made it to the Alabama state capitol on March 25 (SELMA MARCH 5). Dr. King addressed the crowd. He said, **“I know that you are asking today, ‘How long will it take?’ I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth pressed to earth will rise again. How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever. How long? Not long, because you still reap what you sow. How long? Not long, because the arm of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.**

**“How long? Not long. ‘Cause mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on. He has sounded forth the trumpets that shall never call retreat. He is lifting up the hearts of man before His judgment seat. Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer him. Be jubilant, my feet. Our God is marching on.”** A few months later the US Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. (PROJECTOR OFF)

You also may have to deal with some pretty rotten people in the course of your life. They may be people who want your job. They may be people who want your grades or your position. They may want to use you to further their own selfish ends. They may want to harass you for their own enjoyment. They may be family members who mistreat you.

Our responsibility is to commit our ways to the Lord. We are to get our eyes off of the wicked and onto God. We are to remember the fate of the wicked. We are to remember the blessings on the righteous. We are to remember that salvation comes from the Lord.

In the Gospel of Mark #10 vv. 29 & 30 (MARK 10:29) Jesus, the descendant of David, and Son of God, declared, **“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, (MARK 10:30) who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”** In the long run it is always worth it to follow the God of the Bible.