

# When the Bad Guys Win

PSALM 37:12-26 • PART 2: TAKE THE LONG VIEW

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**\*\*COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE\*\***

It is good to be with you this morning, and it is good to be back together! I hope everybody has the elements for the Lord's Supper, hopefully from home. If you do not, we do have a limited supply on the back table, but we are trying to reduce the number of things we touch while we are here in the building. And the same goes for our giving, we are emphasizing the mailing of checks and the online options we have available, to make it a bit safer. Thank you so much for your understanding with this. And as you can tell if you are here in person, we are keeping the building very well ventilated! It's not too often that I'm able to see my breath while preaching, but that day is probably coming in the near future. So, let us bundle up and be thankful that we can be together.

If you are joining us online or on the phone today, we hope you will be prepared to join us in partaking of the Lord's Supper in a few minutes, and we hope you can join us as we sing a song together. After John leads us in the prayers for the Supper, Caleb will be leading us in "God's Family" (#855), and we hope you can join in. And for those of us here in the building, we will head outside immediately. If you have any questions or prayer requests, we hope you will get in touch. Call or text the church number – 608-224-0274. Or send a message to [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com).

Before we get to our study today, I wanted to make sure we are all aware of something we posted on the church Facebook page a few days ago. We have a Christian brother, Victor Glover, who is preparing to head to the International Space Station on the next Space-X launch, hopefully later today – I believe, at 6:27 tonight, from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. As I understand it, this mission has been designated "Crew-1," as it is Dragon's first operational crew mission, the return of human spaceflight to the United States.

In a recent interview with the Christian Chronicle, Victor Glover says that online worship during the COVID-19 pandemic has helped him prepare for worship in space. He will continue with online worship, virtual giving, reading his Bible, and praying. He says he has already sent up communion cups and a Bible, so those will be waiting for him when he arrives. He is the pilot on this six-month mission. When asked what will be going through his mind later today, he says, "I want to use the abilities that God has given me to do my job well and support my crewmates and mission and NASA." Once at the Space Station, his activities will include scientific

experiments, robotic operations and space walks. He's pictured on the wall (or on your screen) with his wife, Diona, and their four daughters – Genesis, Maya, Joia, and Corinne.

Before joining NASA in 2013, the 44-year old Navy commander flew combat missions in Iraq and served as a legislative fellow to US Senator John McCain, also a naval aviator. He and his wife grew up in California. His wife's dad serves as an elder at a congregation near San Francisco. Recently, they've been worshiping online with two churches in the Houston area. He says, "We're just trying to make sure that with these interesting times, our family is doing what would make God happy and not necessarily what we want." Amen to that! So, let's be praying for Victor and his family later today.

As our tradition has been, we are starting this morning with God's plan for our salvation. He sent his Son as a sacrifice, and we respond by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by confessing Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be immersed into the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. At that point, the Christian life begins, and we live for Him. And once again, we have some examples this morning, by way of encouragement.

The pictures on top are of David and Christine, a husband and wife in Uganda, who were baptized last Sunday morning. It was a bit difficult for me to follow the family connections, but it seems that a sister and a mother-in-law followed a few days later, and those are the pics on the bottom. So, we rejoice with this family in Uganda, that they are now brothers and sisters in the Lord, in addition to being related physically.

The next picture here (on the left) is of Denescia being baptized last Sunday at the Hartman Road congregation in Fort Pierce, Florida. My dad lived in Fort Pierce, Florida when he was a kid. When he was 4 or 5, a hurricane came through, his parents rolled him up in a carpet with his sister (to protect them from flying glass), and my dad sometimes talks about looking out of the carpet and seeing the sky! The hurricane had taken the roof off the house. As he tells it, the wind gauge at the airport registered 220 MPH before it blew away completely. That's when they moved back to Nashville. Nevertheless, that was in Fort Pierce. And then we also have another picture from last Sunday (on the right), as Garrett is baptized at the Southern Hills congregation in Franklin, Tennessee, just south of Nashville. Some of you might recognize Clint Opperman in this picture. Clint and Jeri were members here until they moved to Tennessee a number of years ago, and Clint now serves as one of the elders of the Southern Hills congregation. So, we are thankful for these good examples. And again, we share all of this by way of encouragement. What these people have done over the past week, you can do this morning. If you have any questions, if you'd like to study the scriptures together, please get in touch.

If you joined us in our study last week, you might remember that we started looking at Psalm 37, a Psalm written by King David concerning what to do when bad guys seem to win. Obviously, we love it when good people do well. And yet we realize that life is not fair. Often, those who are evil seem to get away with it; and not only get away with it, but often, those who are evil seem to prosper; they do well. And those of us who are working hard and doing the best we can, we see the evil prosper, and it's easy for us to get disillusioned. It's frustrating.

Psalm 37 is written by King David, and it's a Psalm that gives some advice and encouragement concerning how we as God's people need to respond WHEN THE BAD GUYS WIN. Again, life is not fair, so the question is: How do we respond? What do we do?

Last week, then, we looked at verses 1-11, the first of three sections in Psalm 37. We learned that the Psalm is an acrostic, arranged not by topic, but in alphabetical order. So, if you speak Hebrew, it's easier to MEMORIZE,

but it's quite difficult for us to ORGANIZE. David, though, as an old man now, is writing from personal experience. Of all people, David knows that life is not fair, and so he is communicating to us how to deal with that. And for the purpose of our study, we're looking at this Psalm in three sections, starting last week with a series of COMMANDS TO OBEY. In the first 11 verses, we learned that we are not to fret, we are not to be envious of those who do evil, we are to put our trust in the Lord, we are to do good, delight in the Lord, we are to rest and wait on Him, and we are to cease from anger. And we looked at some practical ways to apply those commands, even today.

This morning, we move ahead to the next section of Psalm 37, to verses 12-26. We move from the commands to a series of four observations, and I would describe these observations as reasons to TAKE THE LONG VIEW. And in a way, all of these might fall under the heading that "God Laughs at the Wicked." And I don't mean in a "funny, ha-ha," kind of way, but I'm referring to the idea that the wicked might think they are getting away with something, but God knows better. We might say that he "scoffs" at the wicked. And these are inspired observations that come through King David. And so, as we study, we need to remember that these are observations David is making based on a lifetime of experience. King David has had the advantage of outliving his enemies! And so, as King David looks back over his life, he's able to see some of these things in a way he wasn't able to fully understand when he was in the middle of some of those situations. Toward the end of his life, King David can look back, and he's starting to really see the value of taking the long view. So, these are not the observations of some young college professor based on interviews and research, but this is personal. King David has been through some situations.

Today, then, as we feel discouraged and overwhelmed by the seeming unfairness of life, when we look around us and see the bad guys doing well, King David would encourage us, first, to obey the commands we looked at last week. But also, he would encourage us to TAKE THE LONG VIEW, to try to see things from God's point of view, to try to see things in view of eternity.

If I could go back to an illustration from hiking: There is a huge difference between taking a quick stroll around the block and going on a 20-mile hike in the mountains. We prepare differently. We pack differently. We wear different clothing. We plan differently. And on the actual walk or journey, we pace ourselves differently. In a sense, both journeys really get down to just putting one foot in front of the other, but there's a huge difference, isn't there? And that seems to be what King David is suggesting here: If we look at this life as a quick walk around the block, we might get discouraged at any kind of delay or difficulty or setback, we might get discouraged when the bad guys win; but, if we take the long view, it changes our attitude, doesn't it? And that's what David seems to be telling us here. God has a plan that goes far beyond what we might be able to see over the next few days, weeks, months, or even years. From our point of view, the wicked seem to do well, but from God's point of view (as we discovered last week), the wicked are really like grass – they sprout up quickly, but just as quickly they dry up and burn, just like the grass. So, in verses 12-26, King David gives us a series of very practical life lessons, a series of observations, to help us work through our frustrations.

With this in mind, let's look at these four observations, the words of King David, and so that the print isn't too small, I'll put it on the wall (or on your screen) in four separate chunks – Psalm 37:12-26,

**<sup>12</sup> The wicked plots against the righteous  
And gnashes at him with his teeth.**

**<sup>13</sup> The Lord laughs at him,  
For He sees his day is coming.**

- <sup>14</sup> *The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow  
To cast down the afflicted and the needy,  
To slay those who are upright in conduct.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Their sword will enter their own heart,  
And their bows will be broken.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Better is the little of the righteous  
Than the abundance of many wicked.*
- <sup>17</sup> *For the arms of the wicked will be broken,  
But the LORD sustains the righteous.*
- <sup>18</sup> *The LORD knows the days of the blameless,  
And their inheritance will be forever.*
- <sup>19</sup> *They will not be ashamed in the time of evil,  
And in the days of famine they will have abundance.*
- <sup>20</sup> *But the wicked will perish;  
And the enemies of the LORD will be like the glory of the pastures,  
They vanish—like smoke they vanish away.*
- <sup>21</sup> *The wicked borrows and does not pay back,  
But the righteous is gracious and gives.*
- <sup>22</sup> *For those blessed by Him will inherit the land,  
But those cursed by Him will be cut off.*
- <sup>23</sup> *The steps of a man are established by the LORD,  
And He delights in his way.*
- <sup>24</sup> *When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong,  
Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand.*
- <sup>25</sup> *I have been young and now I am old,  
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken  
Or his descendants begging bread.*
- <sup>26</sup> *All day long he is gracious and lends,  
And his descendants are a blessing.*

Again, as we think about how unfair things can be in this world sometimes, let's go back through this passage, and let's notice how King David reminds us to take the long view.

- I. **And the first area where we need to take the long view comes in verses 12-15 as David describes the wicked who take advantage of others through VIOLENCE.**

In verse 12, the wicked plot against the righteous, they gnash with their teeth – I picture a vicious dog. But as they plot and gnash their teeth, the Lord laughs at this violence, because the Lord sees that his day is coming. From our point of view, we don't always see that, but God takes the long view. So David, as he invites us to take the long view as well, he continues in verse 14 – the wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow, they eagerly cast down the afflicted and the needy, they slay those who are upright in conduct. That's us! We're the ones on the receiving end of this violence, and for us, it looks bad, doesn't it? And yet, King David reminds us (in verse 15), that in the end, this violent behavior will be turned back on these people. In the end, God wins.

Now again, from our point of view, the bad guys often win. From our point of view, justice is delayed far too long. Immediate justice seems to be pretty rare these days. On our way to church when I was a kid, I remember being stopped at a stoplight, and a car flies up beside us on the right-hand shoulder and turns right on red without even stopping. For a brief moment, there was a brief sense of, “What in the world!” But not two seconds later, the car right in front of us lights up like a Christmas tree and peels out after the guy and pulls him over not more than 50 yards around the corner. And I remember my dad saying, “There is justice in the world!” All of this happened within a matter of just a few seconds. Very, very impressive! However, we know that that’s not always the way it works! Usually, bad guys seem to get away with stuff – at least from an earthly point of view. King David is reminding us, though, take the long view, even when it comes to violence – especially when it comes to violence.

It seems that Paul wants us to take the long view as well. I’m thinking of Romans 12:17-21, where Paul says,

***17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. 20 “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.***

So again, when bad guys seem to win, we don’t need to take immediate revenge, but Paul tells us to ***“leave room for the wrath of God.”*** In other words, be patient! Wait a bit. Allow God to take care of it. This doesn’t mean we can’t defend ourselves or protect the lives of others – far from it. There is a huge difference between self-defense and revenge. Over time, though, we need to step back and trust God, because God knows that the wicked are basically digging their own graves. God knows that those who live by the sword will eventually die by the sword. God knows that ***“his day is coming”*** (verse 13). We think of Haman in the book of Esther, plotting against Mordecai, and yet before long, Haman is strung up on the very gallows he had constructed for everybody else. God has a way of working these things out. So, before we get too discouraged by the success of the wicked, David reminds us to take the long view, especially with reference to violence.

**II. As we go back to the text, let’s continue by noticing a second reminder to take the long view, this time with reference to PHYSICAL WEALTH or ABUNDANCE (and we see this in verses 16-19).**

In taking the long view, notice what David has observed through the years, ***“Better is the little of the righteous than the abundance of many wicked.”*** He knows this, because he’s seen this! I’ve seen this. Over the past 30 years, I’ve been in a lot of homes – from tiny one-room apartments to what I might describe as waterfront mansions – and I can tell you, some of the warmest hospitality has happened in those tiny apartments over a frozen pizza. I can also tell you I’ve seen some horribly gut-wrenching family drama in those large and luxurious homes. We might think of what David’s son, Solomon, wrote in Proverbs 15:16, when he said, ***“Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and turmoil with it.”*** Amen to that! We would much rather have a little with the fear of the Lord than to have a great treasure accompanied by turmoil.

And yet, this world often seems to judge and reward success with stuff. If you’re important, you have lots of stuff. And if you have lots of stuff, you must be happy. And yet by taking the long view, David knows that there’s a time coming when ***“the arms of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord sustains the righteous.”*** Years ago, somebody got my parents a plaque that hangs in their home; it says, “Working for the Lord doesn’t pay much,

but the retirement plan is out of this world.” That seems to be what David is saying here. The wicked might cheat, and steal, and build up huge stockpiles of physical resources, but he observes (in verse 18) that, **“The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their inheritance will be forever.”** Or, as the plaque says, “The retirement plan is out of this world.” In fact, in difficult times, in a time of famine, in a time of evil, it’s God who provides for the righteous. We know from scripture that God can do a lot with a little – we think of Elisha and the widow’s oil, we think of Jesus with five loaves and two fish – the Lord sustains the righteous. This is the long view.

**III. As we return to our text, we have another reminder to take the long view (this time in verses 20-22) and the reminder is that in addition to violence and wealth the GLORY of the wicked is also quite temporary.**

Instead of thriving, instead of being honored, the long view teaches us that the wicked with **“perish,”** David says. The enemies of the Lord will be like grass in the fields. They look important, but only for a short time, and then, **“..they vanish – like smoke they vanish away”** (in verse 20).

And then, King David makes an observation based on many years of experience, **“The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives.”** Outwardly, and in the immediate future, the wicked seem to be quite wealthy. They seem to have everything they could possibly need. They have **“glory,”** in a sense. And yet, King David observes: It’s all a show! They are living on credit, “robbing Peter to pay Paul,” as we might say today. They borrow and do not pay back. The wicked are over-extended. They are living beyond their means. They might have the beautiful house, and nice cars, and the latest gadgets and clothing, but it’s all an illusion. It’s all very temporary. They live in constant financial chaos.

On the other hand, he says that **“the righteous is gracious and gives.”** The righteous may not appear to be wealthy, but the righteous actually gives to people. The righteous actually bless others, they are blessed by God, and **“those blessed by Him will inherit the land.”** The righteous are not outwardly wealthy, but the wealth they have they use to help others. They understand what the Lord said in Acts 20:35, **“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”** Those who give to others are truly more blessed than those on the receiving end. Some of the most generous givers are those who give out of the little they have. King David has seen this. He knows this from experience. And so, when it comes to glory, David reminds us that there’s a huge difference when we take the long view.

**IV. The final contrast comes in verses 23-26, and I can only summarize this by noting a long view difference with reference to living with a SAFETY NET.**

And I don’t know if that’s the best way to summarize it, but to me, as I look at the last few verses in this paragraph, that’s pretty much what’s going on here. We might refer to this as God’s protection, as God’s providential care. But by taking the long view, David sees a difference. On one hand, when the evil fall, they fall. But on the other hand, when the steps of a man are established by the Lord, and when the Lord delights in his way, **“...when he falls, he will not be hurled headlong.”** Just a quick note on David’s use of **“steps”** in this passage. **“Steps”** implies forward movement. **“Steps”** implies progress. As God’s people, when the Lord directs our steps, we move forward. But, we are not perfect. We fall. Most of God’s people have fallen. We think of Noah, a good man, and yet he got drunk, didn’t he? We think of Abraham, the father of the faithful, and yet he lied to foreign kings...not once, but twice. We think of Moses, another good man, and yet he killed a man. We think of Peter, a good man, and yet he denied even knowing the Lord. All of us fall from time to time.

Yet, David sees a difference in how we fall as opposed to how the wicked fall. And I can't help but think that David is thinking of himself here. Over and over again, David had fallen, hadn't he? David had made some serious mistakes in life, but God was always there to pick up the pieces. Yes, he fell, but he was not **"hurled headlong,"** because **"...the Lord is the One who holds his hand."** And that's the difference between the long view and the short view. Over time, it becomes more and more obvious that the Lord has been with us.

And this is what David observes in verse 25, **"I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread."** This is the voice of experience. This is some expert testimony right here. After many years, toward the end of his life, David realizes that God has been with his people all along. This is the long view. God is faithful. **"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."** And in spite of their imperfections, God was with Noah. God was with Abraham. God was with Joseph in prison in Egypt. God was with Moses. And God was with David. We might go through some difficult times, but God is our safety net; the Lord is the one who holds our hand. We think of what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4, when he said that **"...we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed,"** because God is with us.

This past Friday afternoon, I saw a meme on social media that perhaps some of you have seen as well. It said, "The reason I'm old and wise is because God protected me when I was young and stupid." That is exactly what King David is saying here. At the end of his life, he's starting to take the long view, and he realizes that God has always been there for him.

### **Conclusion:**

As we come to the end of our study this morning, I'm thankful for the reminder. When good things seem to happen to bad people, when the bad guys win, we have scripture! We have a series of commands to obey: Do this! And then we have a reminder from God through King David to take the long view. Looking back over his life, David understands that although it seems as if the bad guys are winning, he now understands that those who walk with the Lord will come out on top in the end – with reference to POWER, in terms of WEALTH, in terms of GLORY, and with reference to God's PROTECTION.

As I said last week: Whether it's today or 20 years from now, whenever we find ourselves frustrated by what's going on in the world, reading Psalm 37 should be an encouragement to us. I hope you can join us next week as we continue looking at some good words from Psalm 37.

As we close, let's go to God in prayer.

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and awesome God, Creator of heaven and earth, a great and powerful God who cares for his people. We continue to ask your blessing on our members who are recovering from the virus, and we also ask for your continued blessing on those who work in healthcare – that you would keep them safe, and give them the strength they need to carry on in some very difficult circumstances.

This morning we continue to ask for a special blessing on our nation. As you have instructed, we continue to pray for kings and for all in positions of authority, so that we as your people might lead tranquil and quiet lives in all godliness and dignity.

Thank you, Father, for those who have obeyed the gospel over the past several days all around the world. We pray that your kingdom would continue to grow stronger every day. Be with our brother, Victor Glover, and the launch that's planned for later today. We're thankful for his knowledge and skill, and we ask your blessing for his spiritual health and for his safe return at the appropriate time.

We come to you this morning in the name of your Son, Jesus, our savior and King. Lord, come quickly. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)