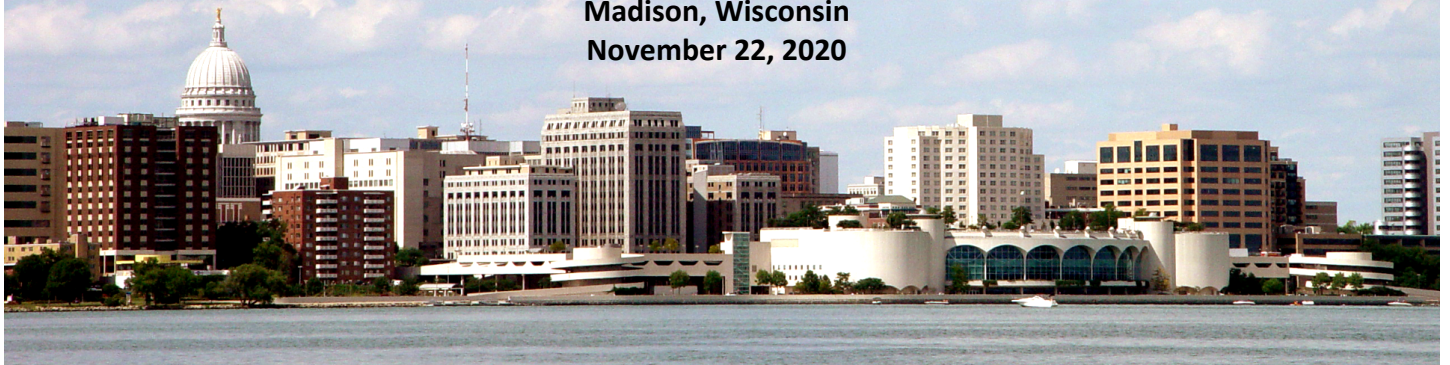


When the Bad Guys Win

PSALM 37:27-40 • PART 3: ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Baxter T. Exum (#1571)
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****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE****

It is good to be with you this morning! I hope all of you are doing well, and I hope everybody has the elements for the Lord's Supper. 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, Josh will be leading us in "Farther Along" (#138), and we would invite you to 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 furlakeschurch@gmail.com.

Before we get to our study today, I'd like to give just a brief update on a Christian brother, Victor Glover, who has now made it safely to the International Space Station. Some of us watched the launch last Sunday night, and thankfully, it went well. So, let us continue remembering Victor, and his family, and the entire crew in our prayers.

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.

We start this morning with Ainsleigh, who got in touch with the Gospel Broadcasting Network after listening to a podcast a few weeks ago. You might remember that we had Mark Teske come speak to us last year to introduce us to GBN. Well, Ainsleigh connected with GBN and after a few days of study, she obeyed the gospel last week. I'm not exactly sure where this is, but we do rejoice with Ainsleigh this morning!

We've also had two baptisms in Hawaii this week! Brennan and Tricia were baptized in Honolulu Friday night, I believe. I have mentioned before how involved the kids are in the baptisms at that congregation, and this past Friday night was no exception. That place was literally crawling with children. The video was about 7 minutes

long, and kids were everywhere. I love that! I also appreciate that they don't generally clap after baptisms there, but instead, everybody says "Amen!" and then they sing, "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus."

The next picture comes to us from the Gray Road Church of Christ in Cincinnati, Ohio, as Meiling Morrison was baptized into Christ just a few days ago. We rejoice with Meiling and her new Christian family this morning, 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 have been with us over the past few weeks, 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 is frustrating.

So, two weeks ago, 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 two weeks 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.

Then, last week, we moved into the next section of Psalm 37, to verses 12-26, from the commands to a series of four observations. And these observations are basically reminders to TAKE THE LONG VIEW as King David reminds us to take the long view with reference to 1.) Violence, and 2.) Wealth, and 3.) Glory, and 4.) God's providential care. As an old man, looking back over his life, David understands at the end that God has been with him all along and that God has a way of taking care of his people. So, when the bad guys seem to win, we take the long view.

With this in mind, let us go back to Psalm 37, and let us conclude by looking at verses 27-40. And as we look at these verses, let's focus in on the idea that ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES. And I know, when we talk about consequences, we often think of NEGATIVE consequences. However, as we think about how we react when bad guys seem to win, let's look at this from both sides, because all actions do have consequences, both good actions and bad actions. King David, then, closes this Psalm with a reminder that ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES.

Let's look at the rest of Psalm 37 – Psalm 37:27-40,

- 27 Depart from evil and do good,
So you will abide forever.***
- 28 For the LORD loves justice
And does not forsake His godly ones;
They are preserved forever,
But the descendants of the wicked will be cut off.***

- ²⁹ *The righteous will inherit the land
And dwell in 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 spies upon the righteous
And seeks to kill him.*
- ³³ *The LORD will not leave him in his hand
Or let him be condemned when he is judged.*
- ³⁴ *Wait for the LORD and keep His way,
And He will exalt you to inherit the land;
When the wicked are cut off, you will see it.*
- ³⁵ *I have seen a wicked, violent man
Spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil.*
- ³⁶ *Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more;
I sought for him, but he could not be found.*
- ³⁷ *Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright;
For the man of peace will have a posterity.*
- ³⁸ *But transgressors will be altogether destroyed;
The posterity of the wicked will be cut off.*
- ³⁹ *But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;
He is their strength in 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.*

Again, as we think about how unfair things can be in this world sometimes, let's wrap up Psalm 37 this morning by noticing that actions have consequences – on one hand, we have blessings on the obedient; and on the other hand, we have a curse on those who are wicked.

I. And in terms of consequences, we start with King David noticing that God has a way of BLESSING THOSE WHO ARE OBEDIENT.

And since this Psalm is arranged alphabetically instead of topically, the blessings are spread out in this passage, but let's notice at least a few of these...

A. ...starting with the promise scattered through several of these verses that those who do good will LIVE FOREVER.

Back when we studied how to study the Bible, we learned to keep an eye out for words that are repeated. And if I've counted correctly, the word "**forever**" is found three times in the first three verses here. That's important! Obviously, in the middle of it, when the bad guys seem to be winning, we don't feel like we're the ones who will be living forever. We sometimes feel as if they will live forever, and we're getting left behind. But here, three times in three verses, King David reminds us that the righteous are really the ones who will be abiding, and preserved, and living in the land "**forever.**" When we obey the Lord, he has a way of blessing us with long-term

stability. And again, this is promised for those who depart from evil and do good. This is promised to those who are righteous. So, one of the first blessings on the righteous is long-term stability (especially as opposed to those who are wicked). In a way, it's the continuation of what we learned last week about taking the long view. Over time, God blesses the righteous.

B. The other blessing on those who are obedient is promised to those who utter wisdom and speak justice (in verse 30): David says (in verse 31) that HIS STEPS WILL NOT SLIP.

In verse 32, the wicked spy on and try to kill those who are righteous; however, in verse 33, God will not allow that to happen; God will not leave the righteous in the hand of the wicked; God will not allow the righteous to be condemned. God, then, is pictured as righting wrongs, as tipping the scales of justice in favor of those who are righteous.

C. There's one more blessing on those who are obedient, and it comes in the last part of this passage: God explains that a man of peace will HAVE A POSTERITY.

He's referring to descendants. The righteous will leave a lasting legacy. In the closing verses, we find that God saves the righteous. God is their strength in a time of trouble. He helps the righteous. He delivers the righteous. Their salvation is from the Lord.

All of this falls under the heading of God blessing those who are obedient – those who do good, those who are righteous, those who keep His way, those who are blameless, those who are upright, those who take refuge in him – they will be blessed.

II. And this leads us to the other side, as King David goes on to explain that just as there are blessings on the righteous, so also there are CURSES ON THE WICKED.

If you remember, the word "*forever*" was used three times in the first part of this passage, with reference to the righteous; well, the little phrase "*cut off*" is also used three times, with reference to the wicked. So, there is a huge contrast here – blessings on the righteous and curses on the wicked.

We won't be going back through this passage line by line, looking for references to the wicked – there are several – but I would like to focus on an interesting picture, starting in verse 35. And actually, some of you might appreciate this, but verse 35 contains the only reference to "**Green Bay**" anywhere in the Bible! Unfortunately, it is not a flattering reference. But in the King James Version, King David says in verse 35, "***I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.***" Well, language has changed a bit over the past 400 years since the King James was first translated; so, the NASB refers to a wicked man, "***...spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil.***" And most modern translations will say something about a native tree that's flourishing.

But the reference isn't really to a tree, is it? Over his long life with many years of experience, what David notices is that a wicked, violent man might spread himself out like a healthy tree in its native soil, but then the wicked man suddenly disappears; and not only does he vanish, but David looks and looks, and there's really not even any evidence that he was ever there at all, "***he was no more.***" We understand this picture. We've had some tree drama right here in Madison over the past few weeks, haven't we? Somebody cut down a couple of trees in the UW Arboretum. They've estimated the damage at more than \$13,000. What a shame. What a waste. Perhaps

you noticed one of local news websites had a headline indicated that police are “stumped” over the loss of those two trees. That headline is almost as painful as losing the trees! Nevertheless, maybe you have a favorite tree. I have a favorite tree – it’s on a little stretch of Maple Grove Drive between Madison and Verona. Sometimes I’ll walk from our house down to Farm and Fleet, and that tree is a highlight. I’ve taken pictures in all four seasons, in snow, and heat, and rain, and sun – it is a beautiful tree. I tell my family that it is the world’s most perfect tree. And yet we know that trees do not last forever. To us, they might seem like they do, but they don’t. Even the strongest trees will eventually disappear. And that’s the picture David paints for us here: The wicked seem so strong and powerful, but in this case, the wicked, violent man passes away. And David remains. God has blessed David by allowing him to outlive his enemies. And David tells us about this by way of encouragement. When the bad guys seem to win, it’s an illusion, because God ultimately blesses the righteous and curses those who are wicked. And they will eventually disappear. They will be *“cut off”* – *“cut off,” “cut off,” “cut off”* – three times in this passage.

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! Then, we have a reminder from God through King David to take the long view. And finally, as we’ve learned this morning, even though life does not seem fair at the moment, God has ultimately promised blessings on the righteous and curses on the wicked. “Tempted and tried we’re oft made to wonder, why it should be thus all the day long, while there are others living about us, never molested, tho’ in the wrong.” And yet, as we also sing, “Farther along we’ll know all about it, farther along we’ll understand why; cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine, we’ll understand it all by and by.”

As I’ve said over the past two weeks: 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.

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 his mission on the International Space Station. We are 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