

## **Psalm 37:1-11: The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth**

### **OUTLINE**

Trust in the Lord  
Delight yourself in the Lord  
Commit your ways to the Lord  
Be still before the Lord

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is hard not to get angry at the way the world is going today. As Christians we know what the truth is; we know what right and wrong are; we know how people are to live their lives as married couples, parents, in holiness and truth. We know that God is to be acknowledged and worshipped. We know what the laws of the Land ought to be when it comes to things like homosexual marriage, euthanasia, abortion, etc. But what are we seeing? The Christianity that used to shape our society is now marginalized, no worse than that it is blamed for all sorts of problems and perceived problems in the past, it is aggressively rejected. In fact anyone who associates with it becomes part of the problem and public enemy number one. More than that we are seeing big government; big education; big pharma; big business; big tech; big social media; big main stream media; big Hollywood; big sports all leaning in a leftist direction. We are seeing the influence of critical theory, transgender ideology, soft forms of communism and many other insidious ideas take over the voices that are heard in the public square and worse than that are now after our children. It is very hard not to get angry in a world like ours.

And what is our response? Anger; anxiety; activism, those are the typical responses. If we look at the responses of those who are not believers and do not know God and do not have our hope, their response will be very different to ours. We are witnessing a storm of views as they clash in the public sphere. The left is demonizing and denouncing the right and vice versa; the personal venom and animosity is tangible; aggressive tribalism and a polarity of views in the new normal; people are ready to be triggered whenever they go out in public just waiting for someone to show their extremist views; public discourse had degraded into mudslinging; thoughtful critique of a person's opinions has given way to ad hominem attacks. And this is infecting the church, the believer is living in the same world; watching the same news; listening to the same social commentators, and having their hearts stirred by the same influencers. We are seeing reactive responses like Christian Nationalism. Where Christianity is being seen as a political tool that needs to be implemented at the national and political level to stop the culture from drifting from its once so called Christian roots. We are seeing an increasing amount of young men being attracted to the activism of Theonomy and Postmillennialism. If you go online the people who are speaking most about the problems with society are the Postmillennials and theonomists. Doug Wilson; Jeff Durbin; as they are mediating Greg Bahnsen; Rushdoony; and many others. They believe that the Mosaic law should be instituted; they are offering a golden era of Christ reigning on the earth. So all we have to do is preach the gospel, and when we become a 51% majority we can then implement their political ideas. They are using the obvious wrongs of society to promote the supposed solutions of their own errors. But because Christians are angry, anxious, and earnest to be active in doing something to stop what is obviously wrong they are buying it.

What does the Bible say about all of this? This is where Psalm 37 is so helpful for us. It is a commentary on what Christ meant when He said, Matt. 5:5, "Blessed are the meek, for they

shall inherit the earth.' This is of course is quoted from Psalm. 37:11, 'But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.' Jesus takes 'inherit the land' referring to Israel and expands it to 'inherit the earth.' Christ is alerting us to the fact that this promise is typological, in other words it is pointing to something bigger and beyond itself, namely the new heavens and the new earth. Last week we looked at psalm 77 where we looked to God's past faithfulness to manage those emotions of anxiety and depression that overwhelm us. Today we are going to use Ps. 37:1-11 to help us think about God's future faithfulness to help us manage the anger and anxiety that overwhelms us when evil seems to be prospering all around us. We will be looking at four actions towards God as our outline: Trust in the Lord; Delight yourself in the Lord; Commit your ways to the Lord; Be still before the Lord.

## **Trust in the Lord**

V1-2, '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.' Our psalm begins with a call not to be governed by anger, and then quickly gives us a reason, we will have a happy ending, the evil will finally be removed. It all sounds so simple, don't be angry, it will all be OK. This of course is not the trite comforting of a hallmark card but deep and profound theology. The rest of the psalm will justify this opening statement. We will not be looking at the whole psalm but there are a few things to note before we dig into our portion.

Firstly, the psalm is an acrostic psalm, this means that every two lines the first word begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This was a literary device used in several psalms, Psalm 119 being the most popular. It is important to know this because it does affect the overall structure of the psalm. If you have ever read psalm 119 you will know that there is a lot of repetition in different words, the material is laid out thematically and does not necessarily have a nice clean logical structure to it. This often makes them difficult to preach because they stubbornly resist being outlined in the ways preachers like to do. That said there are three clear parts to this psalm. V1-11 gives us our initial call to not be angry but to trust in the Lord when evil prospers. V12-24 contrasts the wicked with their deeds and outcomes, and the righteous with their deeds and outcomes. V25-40 end the psalm with the time tested exhortations of an old man showing how all that he has said has been proven true in his own experience. This psalm must have been written by David later in life, v25, reflecting on a long life of seeing God's faithfulness despite evil seeming to prosper. There is a lot of gold in this psalm but time will only allow us to examine the first part.

V3 is the first response on our part when evil prospers, what to do in the place of our default response of anger and anxiety, 'Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.' Trust and obey.... In the first place we are called to turn our eyes away from the dumpster fire that we are fixating on and turn our minds towards the Lord. We believe in a God who is all powerful; whose good purposes will prevail; who is a righteous judge; who cannot be dethroned or His purposes frustrated; a God who keeps His promises; who has promised to be with us; who is able to work all things together for good, etc. Where the temptation is to take our eyes off of God and allow our problems to loom large in our minds; and this leading us to some desperate act, we are called to trust and do good. Not to give up on our holiness, our integrity, our honesty, our good citizenship; our civility; our respectfulness; our lawkeeping; our self-control. The temptation when we see injustice is to resort to taking matters into our own hands and using this world's weapons to secure our future. I am not saying you should not pray; that you should not utilize your democratic opportunities to be a good citizen and use lawful means to bring a good

outcome in society. The basic issue here is that do you really believe that God is in control, that His plan is coming to pass, that He will finally prevail and that the wrath of man does not produce the righteous of God. Are your emotions and your desire to act in line with God's plan or are you gearing for war? Are we automatically drawn to those who are putting on their swords raising the war cry to rally for action, or do you know that God is in control and will prevail. There are actions that we can do our primary task as Christians is to fulfil the great commission, we do this in connection with the Church. We are to pray. We can add that we have a number of positive things we can do as citizens. I am not saying do nothing. I am asking, are you acting like those who don't have God in their lives? Do we have the same emotional angst and desperate need to respond in kind to the evil that we see is prevailing? Is it keeping us distracted so that we cannot think about anything else? Do we have a view of the future that seems hopeless that raising children seems an impossible task?

### **Delight yourself in the Lord**

V4, 'Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.' We move from the problem of where we are putting our confidence to where we find our treasure. It is very interesting to me that David sees our anger over evil as a worship problem. How is anger against evil a worship problem? When we place our treasure in the things of this life; when our lives here are more important to us than God or the future He has laid up for us, we will react badly when they are threatened. We protect what we love, we will fight to the death for that which is most precious to us. This life can loom so large in our hearts that any threat to it causes an instinctive defensiveness. This is not evil in itself, we are supposed to be troubled by injustice, but there is an anger over injustice when we are experiencing it personally that can destroy us because God is not our treasure.

The answer to not getting too angry and sinning is not a cultivated indifference, no we must never decide that evil is not evil, that is a form of self-deception. Feel deeply about injustice and see it for what it is, as Christians we often have the clearest view and the most visceral response to lies and injustice. But when God is your treasure then you can say as Asaph does in Psalm 73 when he is struggling over evil in the world, v25-26, 'Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.' When he saw that God's grace towards him as a stupid sinner was sure even though he was so undeserving the rage in his heart, the accusations against God's goodness, the discontent with his present difficulties they all melted away in his love for a good and gracious God.

When we find ourselves obsessed with the news; unable to look away from the dumpster fire of this world; the last thing we want to do is draw near to God, yet this is the very thing that we need to do in order to find the contentment our hearts need. In fact David tells us that then we will receive all that our heart desires. This of course is not a secret switch to get all your selfish desires met. No, David is telling us that when we love and delight in God our hearts are shaped, and want the right things. It goes something like this. There you are discontent, even critical of God because there is so much injustice, and you cant imagine why He wont do anything about it. Then like Asaph in Psalm 73 you have an encounter with God. That encounter reminds you of your sin; how unworthy you are of His love; yet He loves you; He gives Christ to save you; you are an adopted child of His with a secured future in eternal happiness in His presence. Suddenly the realities of the gospel are more gripping than the audio-visual drama of the slug fest which is the culture wars. You realize that this God has a plan; He has a plan that involves everything in your life and this world. He has a plan that is from His wisdom and is for His glory. And now you are faced with a choice. Do

you choose the world that you think should exist; or do you want the plan that God has and is working out even though you can't see how it all fits together? Your heart has been reminded that God is better than you ever realized and now you want what God wants. This submission of our desires to God's plan is what I understand this 'God giving us the desires of our hearts' to mean. Some take it to mean that if we desire God first, trust and obey Him one day the things that are not present in the world that we desire like justice will be ours in the new creation. That is possible but I suspect that heart surgery is what is intended here.

### **Commit your way to the Lord**

V5-6, '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.' The commentators tell us that the idea of commit means to roll onto. The idea here is the same as 1 Pet. 5:7, 'casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.' David is calling us here to trusting prayer. Put it before the Lord; cast it upon the Lord; take it off your shoulders and roll it onto the only shoulders that can bear the weight of the world. This is what David is encouraging. The act of prayer is often far from us when we are consumed with unbelieving anger. Here David is calling us to the corrective tonic of prayer. But not just prayer, waiting and patient prayer. David urges us to trust God. He assures us He will act. We often need this assurance because when we are full of righteous indignation we find it hard to wait, our emotions need action, but David calls us to patient waiting and prayer. God is just and will not overlook injustice; God does love us and hears our prayers, but there may be a wait.

Our wait might be until the next age. We are not guaranteed justice in this age though we are finally promised justice. If we use David's reference to our righteousness. In the OT this would have manifested in David being vindicated by God even though Saul or Absalom were trying to kill him. For us, like Christ it might only be on the other side of the resurrection. The church is hated now and at times might be shown to be a light and in the truth, but we cannot give up hope if we have no vindication in this life. Christ prepared us for this sort of warfare.

### **Be still before the Lord**

V7, '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.' One of the things we do when we are insensed at injustice is begin to preach the law to ourselves. In order to stir the righteous emotions of anger towards sin we go on and on about how evil something is. There is an endless rhetoric as we wax lyrical about the terrible things that are going on and we go on and on and on and on and on. And by this we work ourselves up into a frenzy mistaking the worked up anger of our anxiety for righteous anger. Compare that inner diatribe with this command, 'Be still before the Lord.' 'Fret not yourself.' But it is unjust; it is terrible, it deserves judgement, do you feel nothing, 'Be Still!' 'Fret not yourself!' There is a time when we have seen the power and sovereignty and goodness of God, that to insist on our anger, for a frenetic activity that tries to take things into our own hands is a denial of God and living by sight and not by faith.

V8-9, 'Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.' I could put a lot of words down here about the destructive power of our anger how it destroys ourselves and others, how it criticizes God and makes a target of our neighbor. When I think about the state of mind being called for here I think of Psalm 131, 'O Lord, my heart is

not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.' They are is a lot in the therapeutic world of wellness today that advocates for a technique of quietness and putting away fretful thoughts and allowing calm to reign. It is true that our souls need calm, but our thoughts need to be taken captive to the truth and not just manipulated. Here the psalmist quiets his soul, and like a child falling asleep in its mother's arms David allows himself to rest at ease in God. The care free confidence of a child that knows that their loving parent will take care of it all. This is the rest we can have in God. We cannot have it in anything else but every believer can have it in God.

V10-11, '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.' And in these final words we will be looking at we are reminded of where we started, we are pointed to the final destiny of that wickedness that is irking our souls. David would have experienced an eschatological intrusion and seen in a physical way what we will see on judgment day. But technically speaking, no matter how long we have to wait in light of eternity, it is a little while, a day and a thousand years are the same to the Lord. And then, and then, the meek will inherit the earth. We will not cultivate the earth and make it by our theonomic strategies, we will be given it as an inheritance because of what Christ does when He comes again. This word meek best describes the attitude that is being encouraged in this psalm. Meekness does not mean weakness, it means gentle and humble, but we see it also means not giving way to anger, but waiting in faithfulness, even while we are being persecuted and mistreated, for God to deliver. Meek means those who do good to those who harm us, good despite the fact people persecute us for it, and submitted to the mighty hand and plan of God, even if it includes suffering.