

Keep Your Eyes Up

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Date: 27 August 2023

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[0 : 00] The reading this evening is Psalm 37, and you can find that in the Church Bibles on page 563. Psalm 37 of David.

Do not fret because of those who are evil, or be envious of those who do wrong. For like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.

Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in him, and he will do this. He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him. Do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger, and turn from wrath.

[1 : 05] Do not fret, it leads only to evil. For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more.

Though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land, and enjoy peace and prosperity. The wicked plot against the righteous, and gnash their teeth at them.

But the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming. The wicked draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose ways are upright.

But their swords will pierce their own hearts, and their bows will be broken. Better the little that the righteous have, than the wealth of many wicked.

For the power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous. The blameless spend their days under the Lord's care, and their inheritance will endure forever.

[2 : 07] In times of disaster, they will not wither. In days of famine, they will enjoy plenty. But the wicked will perish. Though the Lord's enemies are like the flowers of the field, they will be consumed.

They will go up in smoke. The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously. Those the Lord blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be destroyed.

The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him. Though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand. I was young, and now I am old.

Yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken, or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely. Their children will be a blessing. Turn from evil and do good.

Then you will dwell in the land forever. For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed. The offspring of the wicked will perish.

[3 : 12] The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever. The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just. The law of their God is in their hearts.

Their feet do not slip. The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, intent on putting them to death. But the Lord will not leave them in the power of the wicked, or let them be condemned when brought to trial.

Hope in the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land. When the wicked are destroyed, you will see it. I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a luxuriant native tree.

But he soon passed away and was no more. Though I looked for him, he could not be found. Consider the blameless. Observe the upright. A future awaits those who seek peace.

But all sinners will be destroyed. There will be no future for the wicked. The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord. He is their stronghold in time of trouble.

[4 : 16] The Lord helps them and delivers them. He delivers them from the wicked and saves them. Because they take refuge in him. Amen. Thank you so much, Jackie.

Let me just clear all the Bibles from the back turn. Before we dig into Psalm 37, let me just pray for us quickly. Lord God, we thank you for the chance to come here tonight.

To hear your word read and to think about what this means for us. Lord, I pray tonight that your spirit would be at work in our hearts. That you would apply your truth to us.

Lord, I thank you that it is not because of me that that happens. Because of your grace and your goodness and your kindness. So Lord, speak through me tonight. That we all might grow in faith and trusting in you. When the world around us looks so good.

We pray these things, Lord, in your holy name. Amen. Here is a bit of an admission for you. Okay, I can't drive yet. I'm currently working on it. Catherine, my wife, is not happy about how long it's taking.

[5 : 19] But I am learning, I promise. I'm actually working on my theory right now. That's something I've been doing. Here's one thing I've learned. Maybe you don't know this. You can't take your eyes off the road.

Right? That's a really important rule of driving. It's a bit obvious, but it's really true. The second you stop looking at the road, the car follows your eyes and you're in a ditch. The second your eyes get distracted by your friend walking by, it's dangerous.

You can't see the hazards around you. Hazards, it's a technical term. I'll explain it later. You've got to keep your eyes on the right place, directly ahead of you on the road. So you're kept safe.

Otherwise, as we say, you'll end up in a ditch. Now, this isn't just true on the roads. It is a useful analogy in the Christian life. When we're Christians, we need to keep our eyes on the horizon, looking at God, trusting in his ways.

And as soon as we take our eyes off the Lord, we will find our faith drifting sideways until we end up in a ditch. It might not be so obvious as looking at your friend whilst you're driving, because you've got your hands on the wheel.

[6 : 24] You're very aware of what's happening. The drift might end up being a bit more like a rocket ship in space where even a fraction of a degree over the longest period of time means you will miss your target by thousands of miles.

It is true that if our eyes wander, our faith will drift. So what on earth are we meant to do? Well, thankfully, this is not a new problem. This is something people have been struggling with forever. However, since the beginning, God's people have had to fight to keep their eyes on the Lord's instead of the world around them. Now, if you read the Bible, you'll see that his people didn't always do a great job.

But he's given us, in his words, Psalm 37 to help refocus us. King David wrote this Psalm to help us with this exact kind of problem where the things around us can distract us.

It can make us feel angry and frustrated at what's happening, or it can make us feel envious and desire what we cannot have. So in that problem, King David writes Psalm 37.

[7 : 23] And just like practicing for a driving test will remind us in the car to keep our eyes forward, so reading Psalm 37 when living the Christian life will remind us to keep our eyes in the right place, on the Lord directly ahead of us, on the future that is to come, and the God that will save us.

So let's dig in and find out exactly how we are meant to keep our eyes up. Well, thankfully, verse 1 and 2, if you look with me, it's a summary of the whole Psalm, really. It's set up the problem I've just mentioned.

Do not fret because of those who are evil, or be envious of those who do wrong. Don't do that. That is bad. For they will, like the grass, they will soon wither. Like green plants, they will soon die away. It shows that David is writing this to people where living the life following the Lord is hard.

Yet the wicked are flourishing and prospering. The evil ones are getting all of the money and the land and all the great things. The wicked are prospering, and Israel are struggling with that.

They are getting angry. They are getting envious. And it is in the face of that, David dishes out some great wisdom on how to live in light of it. Now, his first bit of wisdom, you'll notice if you have your notice sheets that there are some points in there.

[8 : 33] Ignore them. Things have changed. Sort of. You can follow it, but just, I'm going to explain them. Don't worry, I'll say them quite clearly, right? So his first bit of wisdom, the first point we're going to be looking at, is that we are to lift our eyes from the wicked and look to the Lord.

Simple. Lift our eyes from the wicked and look to the Lord. The way people live around us, and around Israel too, there's no wonder we get distracted. People live flashy lives. People live lives that

seem really unfair.

At times we can look, often in the news these days, are the leaders of big conglomerate companies earning billions and billions in profits, whilst the common man in their house is living in poverty, struggling to pay the bills.

That is unfair, and it distracts us. How can national leaders start a war, yet be living thousands of miles away in a lovely mansion? All the wicked seem to prosper, and the righteous struggle away in poverty.

The thing is about Psalm 37, and the Bible as a whole, right? I want to say this up front. When we talk about the wicked in the Bible, it doesn't only mean those kinds of people, the people who are out and out evil, who do wrong. It includes them, yes, but it doesn't only mean them.

[9 : 46] You see, we live our lives imagining that we are kind of mostly righteous, or we're pretty good. The righteous people are up here. We think there's three groups. The righteous people up here, perfect. The do-gooders. They're the ones who help the leaders across the road.

You know, all of that kind of traditional stuff. Then you've got the wicked down here. They're the people I've just mentioned. The people who start wars, who murder, who rape, who do horrible things. Then in the middle, we have this lovely group, the average Joes, and that's most of us. You know, we're not perfect. We're not awful. We're average Joes. That isn't how the Bible talks. The Bible has two camps, the wicked and the righteous. The righteous are not the best of the best. But in the Bible, the righteous are the people who live the way God meant them, in relationship with him. The righteous are the people who side with the God who created the world and live for him. What's the wicked? They're not the worst. They're not only the worst, but it's any person who stands against God. If you reject him and his rule and choose to live life your way instead of his, well, that means you're in the camp of the wicked.

[10 : 51] If you're paying attention when reading it, that gives some edge to this psalm, especially if you're here tonight and you're not a Christian. If that is, you please don't switch off and think this isn't for you because it's only about to be horrible news.

I want to tell you right now that actually all the way through this, that we're going to finish on some great news. And this psalm could be the most important thing you ever hear. We'll think about it in depth later. But that is who the wicked and the righteous are.

And there's something for all of us there. But what it means overall is that when we talk about our eyes being distracted by the wicked, it's not just by the evildoer. You see, David talks about being envious of those who do wrong, who are in that camp.

And that means the people who live around us, our family, our friends, the people who aren't Christians and get to spend all of their great wage on a really nice holiday.

That's something I always struggle with. I see people having these fancy, amazing two-week-long vacations, all-inclusive. And I just, I really want that. Would love two weeks off in a fancy resort. Maybe you want the nice flats.

[11 : 52] Maybe you want the nice car. Maybe it's not things at all for you. Maybe the thing you're envious of is you see all of the people with those perfect relationships and rom-coms and you just want that. You're trying so hard to be a faithful Christian who is single.

But you see other people around you. You could be going to dates. You see all the people in those great relationships where they don't have to worry about what they do and don't do with each other. This is the kind of envy that we think about.

It's not just of the horrible, evil people. It's of the everyday world outside us. It's the desires the world tells us we should want. Maybe it's perfection. Maybe it's success. Maybe you see the people in your job who are just so good.

You think, that is what I need to do. And all of a sudden our eyes are focused on the success we could have instead of the Lord like it should be. We've taken our eyes off course and we've been nudged one degree in the wrong direction.

Soon enough we will be drastically off course. Everything in the world around us is trying to distract us towards envy or anger. The wicked press in from all around. And so that is exactly why David spends the first eight verses reminding us who and what we should be focusing on.

[13 : 04] You'll see that when we look around us, when you look on TV, on TikTok, on Instagram, the world is appealing. It's tantalizing. It just looks so fun.

It looks so perfect. But David wants us to see that actually the Christian life isn't boring. It isn't implausible. And it isn't unfair. Instead, when we look rightly at God, we will see that it is the best thing we could ever have.

So let's look at verses one to eight. They're all instructions. They're all pieces of wisdom that involve how we interact with the Lord. Trust in the Lord and do good. Take delight in the Lord.

Commit your way to the Lord. Be still before the Lord. There is plenty to chew on here, okay? So notice the first thing. Verse three. Trust in the Lord and do good. Our eyes need to be on God.

We need to trust in what he has done and what he says. We're to commit our way to the Lord. If we can actually get our gaze back on God, as it's meant to be, we will realize the world around us actually holds nothing for us.

[14:10] And he will give us so much more. And the way we do that is by looking at what he has done. Verse three says, Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

That's a bit of a throwback to the people David's writing to. He's writing to the people of God, the Israelites in Israel. And he's saying, dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Because that is what the God of your fathers has done for you.

You see, the big Bible story, Israel were in Egypt in a really rotten place in Exodus. And God takes them out all by himself. And he promised them a land and he gives them that land. And so the first thing David calls them to do is to trust in the Lord and dwell in the land he's given you and enjoy safe pasture.

That's it. Israel are to look back at what God has done and trust that he will keep his end of the bargain and keep them safe in spite of how the world looks around him.

When we look around and feel envious because of what people have, or sorry, when Israel look around and feel envious of the nations around them, they're actually looking at them across the land that God has already given them.

[15:21] Talk about missing the wood for the trees, if that's the right way around of that phrase. They're surrounded by things God has done for them and they already want that one thing they seem to not be able to have.

We need to look to what the Lord has done and trust what he will do. We're to trust in his words. Trusting in the Lord is kind of the definition of being a Christian.

It's following God for what he has said and promised us. And David reminds us that actually what he's going to give us is much better than what the world can have. What he's going to give us is much better than what the world already has.

Verse 6 says, Trust in him and he will do this. He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. Verse 4, he says, Take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

If we follow him and look to him and follow the right course of our lives, there will be a great reward. And there will be a shining vindication. That righteous reward is to be with God forever.

[16:26] To sit at his right hand in the perfect new creation. We will dwell in that land with him. And vindication means that to be vindicated is to be proven right. So to be vindicated, to have our faith vindicated, is what is going to happen when Jesus, when the Lord returns.

The wicked who are doing evil, those who are doing wrong, the people who stand against Israel and God's people, will see in shining lights that they are wrong.

And that those who have trust in the Lord, they are the right ones. The righteous are on the right side of history. We don't see that now. We don't feel that now. But David is saying, when we trust in the Lord, we will see that to be true.

So hold on to that tightly. This promise is so much greater than we could ever imagine. The Lord is promising us so much. Right? We get just a fraction of it in Psalm 37, but it points to so much deeper, wonderful truths.

No relationship that we could ever have is worth our righteous reward. No holiday here. No success. None of that is worth what we will have in heaven forever.

[17:37] None of that is worth the vindication we will feel when Jesus returns. The less we look at God, the more we are distracted, actually the worse that reward seems.

The harder it is to believe that actually what I will get is worth it. And often that's all we think Christianity is. It's just a future thing and we have to deal with misery and pain and struggling now until one day Jesus comes back and everything's fixed.

But that isn't true because we're promised more than that. It's not just a life of misery. No, David tells us that we are to delight in the Lord.

We are to find joy in Him, to rejoice in all He's done. The world around us looks like it's having a great time. But without God, there is no lasting delight. No lasting joy.

That's what verse 4 says. Yes, if we delight in the Lord, we'll get the desires of our hearts. Some might take that to mean that if we get the desires of our heart, we're going to get those things we're kind of craving from the world around us.

[18:44] It doesn't mean that because actually that's not what our heart truly desires. Because our heart's greatest desire is to be fulfilled what it is made for. That is to be with the Lord.

That is to live in His land with His promises, with His people. When we delight in God's greatness, His goodness, His mercy, His love, His grace, His peace, His justice, His wisdom, His presence, His nature as loving Father, then we are fulfilling our heart's greatest desire.

The 4th century writer Augustine famously wrote that our hearts are restless until we find rest in God. That is the kind of desire that David is talking about.

If we don't have that, if we don't delight in the Lord, our hearts will constantly be craving other things. No success, no perfection in your career, no boyfriend, girlfriend, no pleasure can ever fill that gap.

In fact, what you'll find if you go out trying to live for those things, if you try and fill that restless gap in our hearts, it will just seem wider and wider and wider.

[19:55] The only thing that will truly satisfy the desires of your heart is the Lord. As we delight in Him, we will find it easier to be still before the Lord.

That's what verse 7 says. We're to be still before the Lord. We're not to fret or stress. And rather than reacting and acting according to the world around us and the people we see, we're to refrain from anger and turn from wrath.

We're to be still before the Lord. We are not to fret. If you don't know what fretting is, it's summed up as, you know, getting worked up about things. Flapping would be another way I would talk about it. We're not to flap when we see things going wrong.

We're not to get angry at the world around us when the wicked succeeds. No, when we see those things, we're to look at the Lord and be still and wait for Him. We're not to be surprised that the wicked will prosper.

We're not to be surprised that we haven't got a perfect life now because we never promised that. But we are promised if we trust in the Lord, we will dwell with Him forever.

[21:01] We see that phrase two or three times throughout this psalm. We'll look at that a bit later on. Stillness and quietness in the presence of God is the best remedy for most things. Most struggles we have if we sit in peace before the Lord, talking out to Him or crying out to Him, we will find our heart energized.

And when we are tempted to fret or when we feel jealousy and desire for the other things, if we sit before Him reading His word, praying, reading a good book that points us to Him, listening to a good sermon, then our eyes will slowly return back to Him as we see His goodness, as we delight in the things He's told us and who He is in His very nature.

As we see those things, as we sit still before Him waiting, everything else becomes the sideshow, the distraction, and we're aware of that.

Instead, the main event sits before us and is the one thing we long for. Now, it's important to note that Psalm 37 isn't only eight verses long.

David starts by wanting us to focus and move our eyes from the wicked and look to the Lord. And David also wants us to move our eyes from the present and look to the future.

[22:18] We've seen how our eyes are drawn to jealousy and longing, but they're also drawn to anger, that feeling of injustice we have at the state of the world. But both of these responses happen when we're too short-sighted.

If all there is is the here and now, then we need everything to happen here and now. But David is extending our vision to what will come, to the future. Now, first he wants to, before he kind of reminds us of that, he wants to press home who the wicked are and what the wicked do.

The wicked are not just passive. They're not just doing their own thing of wickedness elsewhere. Instead, in Psalm 37, we see that they are against the Lord's people. They are sharpening their swords and stringing their bows.

They are preparing to get rid of them. They are plotting and planning and gnashing their teeth. It's in verse 12. It looks really bad.

But David shows us that actually that means nothing to the Lord. Verse 13, look with me. The Lord laughs at the wicked for he knows their day is coming. You see, God himself has the perfect perception.

[23 : 24] He knows the horizon. He knows exactly what's coming. And we need to reorient ourselves with that vision, not our own one of the here and now. Their day is coming. What happens now is not all there is.

I think there are two pictures I want to focus on, right? It's quite a long sign. There are two pictures to focus on, right? Verse 20 and verse 35 to 36. Let me read verse 20 first. But the wicked will perish, though the Lord's enemies are like the flowers of the fields.

They will be consumed. They will go up in smoke. When the wicked prosper now and we see them in the world around us, they look like a field of flowers, it's colorful, joyful, lovely.

You want to go in and have a look at them because they look so nice. I don't really know what you do with fields of flowers. They're gorgeous to look at. The thing about flowers is they're not going to last. Flowers are temporary.

They burst up quickly in color and then fade away. David is saying the wicked will not last. Not only are they like flowers, but they look like a luxuriant native tree.

[24 : 27] Let me read verse 35. I've seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a luxuriant native tree. But he soon passed away and was no more.

Though I looked for him, he could not be found. The wicked look tall, strong, and firm. When we see them, they look as if they will last forever.

Until one day, they're just not. This is David going to the first person. He has seen a wicked man. He has lived this experience where he saw someone so wicked and flourishing that he was like, they will be there forever.

It looks so good to be them until one day he walked past and they were just gone. I love trees. One of the incredible things about them is their age.

The oldest trees in the world are like over 3,000 years old. When we see a tree, you know, thick of trunk and lush in leaves, my mind is drawn to, like, how long has that been standing there and how long will it be in the years to come?

[25 : 33] And when I look at the world around me and see the wicked flourishing and having a great time doing things that is obviously wrong, I think they're just going to be able to succeed forever. But in reality, they will pass.

They will disappear. They will fade from view. You see, in reality, the wicked are not like a tree. They are temporary and fickle because they only succeed in the now.

They can have as good a life as they can make for themselves now, but even the one who looks the firmest in the world will, in the future, pass away.

Not even the roots or the trunk will remain. As David says, one day, we will walk past and it's like they were never there. Both of these pictures lift our eyes from the here and now to the future where the wicked will receive what they deserve.

And it stands in great contrast to those who side with the Lord. The righteous will dwell in the land forever. They will inherit the land. They will dwell in it forever. It is stark.

[26 : 39] And in reality, when we get jealous of the world around us, when we are tempted to swerve and drift from what God has called us to, this is what our mind needs to remember. This is the vision we have to see.

The option, the decisions we make, it isn't as simple as, well, do I just maybe skip church again this week to go for brunch with my friends? The decision is, will I go to my small group or will I go out on a date with that person from Tinder?

The option isn't, well, I could go to both services or I could stay home and actually just work really hard because I'm really desperate to be Luke, the best person in my office. The choice is actually, will I trust in the Lord and await his promises of dwelling with him forever or will I turn from him and face death living in my own strength?

The decisions we make when it comes to our faith and where we look are not temporary. They will have eternal consequences. Now, this may sound really hard to hear because it is, but that is the decision we have to make every day.

Will we side with the Lord or against him? Because this death that the wicked face is not one that just happens, it's not one necessarily of old age. It is one that the Lord brings about.

[27 : 55] As Jackie read for us, I'm sure it hit you again and again and again. The Lord destroys those he curses. He destroys wrongdoers. God's wrath is swift for those who deserve it.

They'll be completely destroyed. They'll be burned away. The wicked of this psalm certainly burn away just like the flowers in the fields.

You see, these people have earned their punishment. They've earned in their selfish wrongdoing what is coming. Their wicked schemes will not go unnoticed. So we do not have to, like verse 1 says, fret at the actions of the evil ones or be envious of those who do wrong.

We don't need to fret because God has it in hand. Now this is jarring. This can be hard to hear, especially if you're amongst us and you're not currently a believer.

You're not a Christian. As I said earlier, the righteous and wicked are not separated by our deeds but by what side we stand. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus and all he's done?

[29 : 00] If you're not on the side of the Lord, then this psalm is describing what will happen to you. Death is the only outcome when you stand against the God who created all things. But thankfully, David doesn't leave us hanging there.

He doesn't leave you without hope or an option. Instead, David, after turning our eyes to the future, he turns our eyes back to the Lord who saves.

We're to keep our eyes on the Lord and trust his saving ways. This is one of the most important places that our eyes could ever be and arguably it's the only place it should ever be. This might sound very similar to the first point.

It kind of is but we're just going to roll with it. What we need to do is lock our eyes on the Lord and his saving ways. We're looking at verses 39 to 40 here. Let me just read them all out. The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord.

He is their stronghold in times of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them. He delivers them from the wicked and saves them because they take refuge in him. Salvation comes from the Lord and the Lord alone.

[30 : 04] The story of the Bible tells us that God sent his one and only son to die the death that the wicked are promised. Jesus did not come to save the righteous but he came to save sinners to make sinners into righteous people.

Taking away their evil and wrongdoing and making them perfect in the eyes of God. If tonight you're seeing for the first time really what the future that lies ahead of you is then let me encourage you to go to God to see the promises he offers you.

Turn to Jesus as the Bible presents in the Gospels. If you've never thought about it then go and read them. Hear who this man is and what he's done for you.

David says to trust the Lord and take delight in him. You need to know who he is to do that. We need to turn from Psalm 37 and look to Christ.

The one who takes away that punishment who bore on the cross the destruction we deserved to make us righteous. He can be your salvation and your refuge.

[31 : 21] The gods who will give you the desires of your heart that you don't even realize you have. He will bring you a rest that you can only find in him. Not only that but look what else he brings to his people.

Look at the other positive things we get here and now and in the future. I'm just going to skirt through them, right? The blameless will spend their days under his care as he looks out for them and cares for them with an inheritance that endures forever.

There is no temporary when it comes to God's blessings. In disaster they will not wither and in famine they will enjoy plenty. The Lord will make firm the steps of the ones who delight in him.

They will never fall when he is with them for the Lord upholds him. When the wicked perish and go up in smoke the Lord will not forsake his faithful ones.

He will uphold every one of their steps. Whether you're a believer now or not David lays out the option side with the wicked and face what will come or stand with the Lord trusting in him committing your way to him delighting in him and in his very presence being still before him turning our eyes from the world and the hazards around us up to the God who is standing there calling us.

[32 : 38] Nothing that the world has to offer is worth exchanging what God promises us. nothing is worth that swap.

No fleeting pleasure no temporary swap no fancy holiday no boyfriend no money as we look at Psalm 37 take heed of the warning that is in there and look to the future that is coming and side with Christ trust in him as he brings you into the righteous fold as he makes you part of his family forever.

Let me pray. Lord God help us to tear our eyes away from the world that flashes before us. Lord I ask that you would help us to rest upon you the great God who never changes and who upholds our every step. Lord we long for the righteous reward that shines like the sun but in this world it can seem so dim.

So help us to turn our eyes to you to trust you to commit our ways to you and to delight in all that you've given us. Lord I pray for every one of us tonight that you would be our stronghold in times of trouble that you would deliver us from the wicked and save us as we take refuge in you.

[34 : 05] Lord I pray that we would all come to Christ that our eyes would rise up to him seeing him for who he is and what he's done and we would take refuge in him. Lord uphold us and save us protect us and bless us.

In Jesus name Amen.