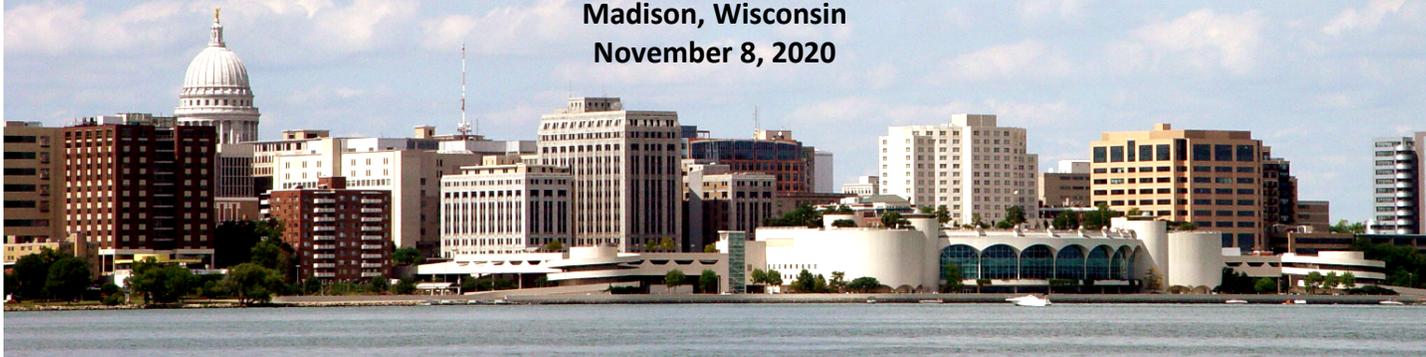


# When the Bad Guys Win

PSALM 37:1-11 • PART 1: COMMANDS TO OBEY

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**\*\*COVID-19 LIVESTREAM\*\***

It is good to be with you this morning! This is now the second week of our pause, going back to studying together exclusively online and on the phone. As most of you know, we are continuing with something of a spike in COVID-19 cases here in Dane County, and we still have several in the congregation who are not doing well. Due to this video being somewhat public, I have tried to respect privacy by not mentioning people by name, but God knows. All of our members have a church directory, so I do hope we are checking in on each other as we should.

Since we are not meeting in person today, we'd like to encourage everybody to sing, and to pray, and to give, and to partake of the Lord's Supper – all of these things we can do either on our own or with our families. We've posted some good recipes for the unleavened bread. We have links and an address for giving both on the website and in the bulletin. And if you have something we need to be praying about as a congregation or as an eldership, we hope you will get in touch either by call, or by text, or by email. The church number is 608-224-0274, and our email address is [furlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:furlakeschurch@gmail.com).

It's a bit strange to me that we already have new traditions this year, but as our custom 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 with a report by Ricky Gootam (in India) who baptized Ramesh last Lord's Day morning. Ramesh has been attending worship with the congregation for several years, along with his family, but now Ramesh has become a Christian. Ricky says that Ramesh is a bank manager in Allahabad. But we rejoice with Ramesh and his new Christian family this morning.

And then we also have another update from Alfred Beyen, a gospel preacher in Liberia, as he reports a number of baptisms this week. He says that over the past one and a half months they have been studying with a denominational church known as the "Life of Christ Church." Last Sunday, they did the first baptisms, transforming that man-made religious group into a congregation of the Lord's people. This Sunday will be their

first meeting together as the Lord's church in lower Johnsonville, Liberia. **\*\*PPT\*\*** The next picture is of two groups who have recently been baptized. That is some amazing news, to see an entire group turn toward the simplicity of pure New Testament Christianity. 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.

Most of us appreciate seeing good people do well. It makes us feel good when a nice person recovers from a terrible illness. We like seeing good behavior rewarded. And yet, at the same time, we also realize that this isn't always the way things work. In fact, many times, those who are evil are the ones who seem to win in the end. Somebody sideswipes your car in the parking lot, and they get away, never being held accountable. A good person gets sick and dies. The little guy gets crushed by a huge corporation. I fill up at the gas station, somebody steals my debit card number, and they seem to get away with it.

This morning, then, and for the next two Sundays, I'd like for us to study a Psalm that I've been thinking about for a number of months now, and it basically gives some advice and encouragement concerning how we as God's people need to respond WHEN THE BAD GUYS WIN. As most of us know by now, life is not fair. Those who are unqualified get promoted, terrible human beings get elected, and those who lie, cheat, and steal seem to get away with it. And here we are, doing the best we can, and we're the ones who seem to be getting sick, and ripped off, and ignored. And the question is: How do we respond to this? What do we do, what do we need to be thinking, when the bad guys win?

The psalm is Psalm 37, written by King David. As we'll discover next week, David is an old man as he writes this psalm, and as an old man, David has seen some things, hasn't he? Of all people, David is someone who knows that life is not fair, that life does not always seem to reward the righteous. As a teenager, we think about David being overlooked by his own father, looked down upon by his brothers. And then, even after he's anointed as the future king, he spends most of his 20's on the run for his life from King Saul. Years later, he's run out of town by his son Absalom, his own wife turns against him, and yet through all of it, David keeps the faith. He's not perfect by any means, but he's faithful. And now, as an older man, King David writes a song.

Before we get into it, I should point out that Psalm 37 is something of an acrostic, as it seems to be arranged around the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, where roughly every other verse starts with the next letter. So, as you can imagine, this probably makes this psalm a bit easier to memorize (in Hebrew, anyway – this doesn't really come through for us in English), but as you can also probably imagine, this makes Psalm 37 a little bit difficult to organize. In fact, Psalm 37 seems to have more in common with the Proverbs than it does with the Psalms – it's almost, "What to do When Bad Guys Win," arranged in alphabetical order! Due to the arrangement, then, the subject matter is a bit jumbled. This morning, though, we'll be looking at a series of commands to obey (in verses 1-11), next week we'll look at David's advice to take the long view of life (in verses 12-26), and the week after that we hope to end with his reminder that actions do have consequences (in verses 27-40).

Today, though, let's look at a series of commands to obey, and we see this in verses 1-11. Let's look together at Psalm 37:1-11, the words of King David – Psalm 37:1-11,

- <sup>1</sup> ***Do not fret because of evildoers,  
Be not envious toward wrongdoers.***
- <sup>2</sup> ***For they will wither quickly like the grass  
And fade like the green herb.***

- <sup>3</sup> *Trust in the LORD and do good;  
Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Delight yourself in the LORD;  
And He will give you the desires of your heart.*
- <sup>5</sup> *Commit your way to the LORD,  
Trust also in Him, and He will do it.*
- <sup>6</sup> *He will bring forth your righteousness as the light  
And your judgment as the noonday.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him;  
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,  
Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Cease from anger and forsake wrath;  
Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing.*
- <sup>9</sup> *For evildoers will be cut off,  
But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more;  
And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there.*
- <sup>11</sup> *But the humble will inherit the land  
And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.*

Again, as we think about how unfair things can be in this world sometimes, let's look for some commands to obey in these first 11 verses.

- I. **And we start right away in verse 1, as King David gives a very clear command, DO NOT FRET BECAUSE OF EVILDOERS.**

As I studied this week, I suddenly realized that *"fret"* is not a word that I use too often, or ever! I think I know what it means, but I looked it up in some other translations to try to get a clearer picture here. The KJV has David saying, *"Fret not thyself because of evildoers."* Again, never in my life have I ever told somebody to *"Fret not thyself."* I might need to start saying this more often. Other translations say, *"Don't worry about the wicked"* (NLT), or, *"Do not be agitated by evildoers"* (CSB), or, *"Burn not with vexation because of evil-doers"* (again, this is another phrase I don't use too often these days), but surprisingly, even most modern translations have continued to use the word *"fret."*

We look up the word *"fret,"* and it basically refers to being "frustrated." It goes back to a word referring to getting "overheated" or "flaring up." I think of getting overheated, and I think of a trip our family took to Tennessee when I was a kid, and on the trip from Nashville over to Memphis to attend a series of lectures at the Getwell congregation in Memphis, our 1979 Plymouth Volaré overheated. Something went wrong with the radiator. Well, my dad had heard that you can turn the heat on full blast to help dissipate some of that heat away from the engine and into the passenger compartment. That was a memorable trip! I remember mom's lipstick completely melting in her purse. We made it, but instead of the engine overheating, we were the ones who overheated. This is the word King David uses here, "Do not FRET; do not get overheated; do not get frustrated; do not get annoyed by the successes of evildoers." Do not fret when the bad guys seem to win. It's hard not to fret under these circumstances, but this is some inspired advice from the old man, King David. He has seen the bad guys win from time to time. But he also knows that those victories are very temporary, and we'll see this over and over again in this chapter.

If we are paying attention to what's going on in the world right now, we have some pretty good reasons to **"fret,"** but King David tells us NOT to fret. We are not to be overcome with worry when we see evil people doing well. In fact, we have this command three times in these opening verses, don't we? **"Do not fret, do not fret, do not fret!"** This is a command from God through King David, a command to be obeyed. As we just studied a week or two ago: We might not be able to stop certain thoughts from entering our minds, but when they do, instead of worrying about those things, we can choose to pray about those concerns. And so, instead of fretting about politics, or the virus, or the economy, since we are already thinking about these things, let's turn those concerns into prayers.

**II. As we go back to the text, let's continue by noticing a second command to be obeyed, that we are not to be ENVIIOUS toward wrongdoers.**

As I understand it, envy is a strong feeling of resentment; but it seems to include a feeling of jealousy combined with evil motives. In other words, "I want what that person has, and I would consider doing something evil to get it." And so, when I see an evil person prosper and do well, and I'm over here doing right and suffering, I might be tempted to start wanting what he has, even to the point of switching sides or wishing that I could. It's a sin based on making a comparison. Instead of being content, I see what somebody else has, and I'm no longer thankful for how God has blessed me, but I want what they have.

Notice, though, as David moves from verse 1 to verse 2, he gives a reason for not going down this road, and the reason seems to go back to something he learned early in life as a shepherd. He says, **"Be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb."** He pictures envy, then, as longing for grass. It looks good at the moment, but it's temporary. In the same way, when the evil prosper, their prosperity is incredibly brief, and it really makes no sense to envy what they have. And we'll get back to this next week with the idea of taking the long view. But for now, we have the command, **"Do not be envious toward wrongdoers."** Don't waste your time wishing you had something that'll wither and fade almost immediately.

**III. As we go back to the text, we have a third command to be obeyed in verse 3 as we are told to TRUST IN THE LORD.**

As I understand it, **"trust"** is the idea of leaning confidently on someone or something for support. I hope to talk more about this in the future, but on my recent trip out to see my sister, I learned something about the value of trekking poles while hiking. I had some serious hikes planned, and my sister said if I did this one particular hike, "You will need trekking poles. Do not do that hike without them." Well, I've always been a fan of what I refer to as my "Moses stick," a hiking staff. It's my son's old bow staff from karate. I've planed it down on two edges, I've sharpened one end of it, I've added a camera ball mount on the top of it. I love my Moses stick! But my sister said, "No, that won't do it. If you don't want to die, you need trekking poles." So, I shopped around and ended up going with some highly-rated trekking poles at Wal-Mart in case I needed to make a return at some point. On my first real hike in the mountains on this last trip, those \$20 trekking poles literally saved my life at least half a dozen times! And several more times on some other hikes out there. There were trails where you could look over the cliff and not see the bottom. And there were several times when those \$20 poles caught me as I was falling. And as the miles added up, those poles very quickly earned my trust. I came to lean on them for support.

And that's what David is suggesting here – and not just suggesting, he is commanding it, that we ***“trust in the Lord.”*** Lean on him for support. The word seems to be the Old Testament equivalent of “faith” in the New Testament, and it's found more than a hundred times in the Hebrew Bible.

The alternative to trusting in God, of course, is putting our trust in people, in government, in politicians, in science. How is that working out for us? It often leads to disappointment, doesn't it? People let us down. Some people are more trustworthy than others, of course, but others prove themselves to be unworthy of our trust. But we also know that there's great comfort in finding someone we can trust. I compare it to trusting the driver of a car on a long trip. A long trip is a whole lot more pleasant if you trust the driver. Some of you know that years ago my wife and I drove together to see her sister in Fort Collins, Colorado. And after driving west through Nebraska, I told my wife, “I can't do Nebraska again! It's too big! It's too boring! I can't do it again!” And I told her, “The next time we drive through Nebraska on the way home, I need to be unconscious. Can I be unconscious?” She agreed, and on the way home, on the Wyoming border, she took over. And thankfully, I knew I could trust her as a driver. I fell asleep rather quickly, and I was spared the experience of being awake through Nebraska. The point is: I could trust her. Now imagine if I didn't. Without that trust, that trip would have been miserable – worrying through every turn, every stop, every lane change, and so on. With God, though, like a good driver, we can feel secure. Even when the bad guys seem to win, even when life seems to fall apart all around us, we can lean on God for support. We trust him.

#### IV. As we go back to the text, we have a fourth command (in verse 3) as we are told to DO GOOD.

And I find it interesting that these two seem to be pretty closely tied together, ***“Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.”*** When we trust in the Lord, that trust allows us to continue doing good, despite our circumstances, despite looking around us and seeing those who are evil doing well in life. In other words, I don't focus on what they are doing, but I refocus on what I need to be doing. Instead of reacting with worry and despair, we get to work. We ***“do good.”*** We show the world how it's done. We show the world that true happiness isn't found in a party on Langdon Street, but instead, true joy is found in doing good.

Obviously, there's quite a bit of turmoil in the world around us, tied to the election. And it would be so easy to get pulled into that. At this point, though, I can't really fix this problem. But you know what I can do? I can go out and get some more brownie mix for the kids at Shults-Lewis! In fact, I think I need to go back to Aldi and buy some cookie mix for the kids...until I feel better about the election. And so, when we get back to worshipping in the building, and if you can't get in because the entire building is packed with brownie mix, that was me! I might be exaggerating, but this seems to be what David is saying here. When bad guys do well, we respond by doing good. We dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. We do what God's people always do – according to Hebrews 13:16, we ***“...do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”*** We don't let somebody else's evil distract us from doing what is good. In fact, the more good we do, the less chance evil has of ultimately succeeding – and by that I mean that the more good we do, the less time we have to fret and to be envious. Doing good has a way of keeping us out of trouble ourselves.

#### V. As we go back to Psalm 37, we find (in verse 4) that we are to DELIGHT IN THE LORD.

This doesn't mean that we just need to fake a smile when we come together to worship, but it means that the Lord himself is our greatest delight. The word itself refers to something that is “soft, or delicate, or dainty.” I don't know about you, but I don't think about King David in those terms! But it's the idea that God himself is

our greatest delight – and so we take great pleasure in studying his word, in coming to him in prayer, in singing songs of praise – we love the Lord more than anything.

Sometimes we sing the song, “His Yoke is Easy,”

I’ve found my Lord and He is mine,  
He won me by His love;  
I’ll serve Him all my years of time,  
And dwell with Him above.

His yoke is easy, His burden is light,  
I’ve found it so, I’ve found it so;  
His service is my sweetest delight,  
His blessings ever flow.

His service is our sweetest delight! That’s what David is suggesting here. We might imagine a little kid opening up a birthday present. Those eyes get huge; this is the best thing ever. In a slightly similar way, our relationship with God is everything to us. Our relationship with God is more important than the relationship we have with our spouse, with our children, with our job, or with anybody else. In a world where bad guys win, the Lord comes first. When terrible things happen, we turn our eyes back to Jesus. When we constantly look at the problem, evil seems almost overwhelming, and so we have the reminder here: We are to delight in the Lord. Turn to him. And then, when we want what he wants, God says that he will give us the desires of our heart. Somebody has suggested that Psalm 37:4 is the Matthew 6:33 of the Old Testament, ***“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*** We are to ***“delight in the Lord.”***

**VI. As we go back to the text, we find (in verse 7 and also in verses 9-11) that we are to REST AND WAIT.**

In this context, to ***“rest”*** is to be quiet, to be still. It’s hard for us to be quiet these days. A lot of people have a hard time with silence. And so we distract ourselves with music in the background, and movies, and just constant activity. But there is a value to resting in the Lord and waiting patiently for Him. There is a value in spending time alone with God without always saying something. This doesn’t mean we are lazy, but resting in the Lord and waiting patiently are commanded. This is an “order from headquarters,” as my grandmother used to say. In faith, instead of fretting, instead of lashing out in anger when the bad guys win, sometimes we need to simply be quiet and wait. This is the opposite of panic.

I don’t share this to brag at all, but speaking of not panicking, one of our election officials down at Chavez is a retired accountant and auditor, she sent a letter to the City Clerk, a few days ago, and among other things, she said that Baxter’s “...cool calm demeanor [as the Chief Inspector] was an example set and followed by the rest of us.” I think I laughed out loud when I read this. Now I share this, in part, to confess that I was not always cool and calm on the inside this past Tuesday. It was a long day. But I also share this to illustrate that as God’s people, we don’t usually panic too easily, do we? We know that we are a part of a much larger plan. We do our part, we might have a thousand challenges coming at us from all different directions, but we also know that God has a way of taking care of things. And so, we rest and we wait.

VII. **As we go back to the text, we have another command (in verse 8) as we are told to CEASE FROM ANGER.**

***“Cease from anger and forsake wrath,”*** David says. The word ***“anger”*** in this passage goes back to a word referring to “nostrils.” Okay, well, that’s a little weird! Until we realize what happens when we get really mad! Our nostrils flare! Our anger changes the way we look. We huff, and we puff, and we snort. We look at somebody, and we can often tell by looking at their face how mad they are. And that seems to be what’s going on here. Not that we can never be angry about anything, but when the bad guys win, we can’t get be getting burned up about it. We cannot live in a constant state of rage. When the bad guys win, we can’t be going around constantly clenching our teeth and huffing and puffing. Why not? Well, as with fretting (as we discussed earlier), it ***“leads only to evildoing.”*** Nothing good comes from living in a constant state of anger. It’s not good for us, neither physically nor spiritually. Constant anger is dangerous. And so we are told to ***“cease from anger.”*** To ***“cease”*** is to relax, to let go, to let the Lord handle it. Or, as Paul says in Romans 12:21, ***“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*** Responding with anger and wrath usually doesn’t help a situation. And here, the warning is that it might actually lead to ***“evildoing.”*** As God’s people, we are different. And so, we are to ***“cease from anger.”*** If I need to turn the news off for a few days, if that’s what it takes to not be angry all the time, then that’s what I need to do. But we are to cease from anger and wrath.

**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! As Israel’s king for most of his life, King David certainly saw some terrible things. But he also saw good things happen to bad people. And when the same thing continues to happen today, we have these commands. And this isn’t just a one-time thing, but from here on out, we can come back here for the reminder. 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, and the Psalm starts with a series of very simple commands. 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. You are the King of kings and Lord of lords. We are thankful for the opportunity to study your word this morning.

We continue to ask your blessing on our members who are suffering with 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. Be with our members who are in the process of recovering. We pray that they would continue getting stronger.

This morning we also 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 the borders of your kingdom would continue to expand and that the saving power of your gospel would continue reaching out to every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You are truly worthy of all praise.

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)