

## **“Finding Hope In The Eternal God”**

*20 September 2020 - Led by Ethan Boyd*

### **Welcome & Call To Worship:**

Good morning and welcome to our service this morning at Adelaide Road. Obviously, we are back to doing services online and it's a little surreal to be talking to you this morning from an empty church, especially as we were all getting used to being back at church again. However, it is still a pleasure to have you with us, either live now or if you're watching later on, as we join together to worship the Lord, so you are all very welcome! To open our service this morning, I would like to read to you Psalm 122.

Of course, this psalm was sung by God's people as they approached Jerusalem or as they went up to the temple, and we find ourselves in a very different situation this morning. However we can still rejoice that we can join together as a church to worship the Lord, even if it is through the medium of technology. We can still rejoice that we have a God who saves and who is worthy of all praise.

So let's rejoice together and worship Him as we sing our first song this morning.

**Hymn of Preparation:** This Is Amazing Grace

### **Prayers of Adoration & Confession:**

Heavenly Father, what a privilege it is to know that although we live in ever-changing circumstances, You do not change. You are the eternal God, who was there before the earth began, is together with us now in this present moment, and will continue to reign on Your throne for ever and ever. Your promises continue to be trustworthy and you have never gone back on Your word. You always tell the truth and that is an immense comfort in a world that is often filled with lies and fake news. You are a mighty fortress, a shield around us and our very salvation. Truly there is nothing better than to be counted as children of a Father who loves us more than we could ever imagine.

But Lord, just as You do not change, we acknowledge that we do change. We have promised to always be faithful to you, Lord, but we often seek purpose and satisfaction from idols, such as work, money or entertainment. We have committed to love You with all of our hearts, but we often struggle to find time to talk to You in prayer and to dwell on the promises that we find in Your Word. Just as You are completely committed in Your love for us, we are often half-hearted in our love for You. We are quick to find excuses and slow to take responsibility for our actions.

Lord, we pray that You would forgive us for when we don't follow You, love You or trust You as we should. We ask for Your forgiveness when we don't find time for You in our lives because we don't count time spent with You as a priority. We ask that You will reignite our faith in You and in Your word. We pray that You will help us to live as Your children and that everything that we do from eating breakfast to chatting with our friends would be an act of worship to You, Lord. In this new quarantine phase, help us not to grow further away from Your church and our brothers and sisters who love You, but to grow towards them, to take the initiative and find new ways to serve each other so that we can serve You. Help us, Lord, to live out our faith in practical ways, so that we can serve You each and every day of our

lives. Father, we know that You are God and we pray with complete faith and confidence that You hear our prayers, for we pray in the name of Your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Reading:** Psalm 37:1-11

**Sermon:**

I invite you to keep your Bibles open to Psalm 37 as we look at God's Word together.

How many of you listening this morning like being told what to do? When you were younger, did you ever dream of that one day in the future when you would grow up and you could live on your own? When you could eat ice cream for breakfast and go to bed any time that you want? I'm sure that I'm not the only one that ever dreamed about that. There is something in our hearts that doesn't like being told what to do, whether that's by a parent, a teacher, or a boss. In my own head I like to think that I know best so I should be the one deciding what I should do with my life. But as you grow up, you become mature, you see why your parents, or your teachers told you to do those things. You see the heart behind the instruction, and it makes sense. Your parents wanted to protect you and for you to grow up healthy. Your teacher wanted you to learn so that you could contribute to society. And Psalm 37 is a little bit like that. It's an instructional psalm or a wisdom psalm, written by David in his older years. And in the Hebrew it is written in as an acrostic, with the first letter of each line being in alphabetical order so that when you read it you could try to memorise it. Because it is filled with instructions that tell us what to do and how to live. But what I hope we can see this morning is that these are not just rules from someone looking to lecture us, but good instructions, that ultimately come from a loving, eternal and all-knowing God. Before we dive into the passage, let's pray and ask God for His help through the Holy Spirit.

(prayer)

## **I. Heart**

I recently saw a Disney film called *Inside Out*. In the film, a girl is going through the transition from child to teenager which is never an easy time for anyone. And the emotions that she is feeling are the main characters. The story is told from the point of view of the emotions inside her head. So you have Joy, Sadness, Anger and others, which take it in turns in controlling the girl's brain based on her emotions. For example, when Joy is in control then she will always see the bright side of life, when Sadness is in control then she will be more pessimistic and want to stay on her own, and so on. And the point that the film is making is that we are often controlled by and subject to our emotions. Our day to day experience of life and how that makes us feel has a huge bearing on what we think, say and how we behave. And this is the same context that David is writing about here in Psalm 37. David is writing to and sharing his wisdom with people who are overcome by worry, who struggle with envy or jealousy and who are angry at those who have done wrong to them.

In verse one we can see that this psalm is addressed to those who are struggling with worry - 'Do not fret because of evil men' - and struggling with envy - 'do not be envious of those who do wrong'. In fact, he repeats do not fret twice more in verses 7 and 8 - 'do not fret when men succeed in their ways' and 'do not fret, it only leads to evil'. And furthermore, in verse 8, David warns 'refrain from anger and turn from wrath'. So these negative emotions are obvious and clear to see. As we have seen in the previous psalms that we studied in this summer series, David himself dealt with these emotions as he ran for his life, as he saw people try to attack and kill him and his family. And the key question that we have to ask

ourselves is why? Why did he feel anxiety, anger and envy? And why are the readers of this psalm feeling those same emotions. Our first instinct might be to look at the 'evil men who do wrong' in verse 1. After all, isn't it natural to feel anger at those who do evil, especially if it seems that they are getting away with it? But David doesn't stop there, he dives much deeper and looks at the heart of the matter which is the human heart itself.

When a doctor is presented with a sick patient, they don't look at the individual symptoms that a patient has. They try to determine the root of the problem. So if you went to a doctor with a fever and a cough today, they wouldn't just give you a paracetamol for the fever and some cough syrup. Or at least I hope not. They would run a test for Covid-19, wouldn't they? Because the symptoms are not the problem, it is the underlying cause, the virus, which is causing the issues. Unless the underlying cause is dealt with then true healing cannot happen. And unlike in the movie, where it is simply a matter of one emotion taking control of the brain for too much time, David instead identifies that the problem is coming from our relationship and faith in God. His diagnosis is that the readers of this psalm are too focused on the here and now and they have forgotten about God. David himself must have been so familiar with that feeling of wanting to punish those who do evil and wanting to punish them now, right this moment, instead of trusting in God and waiting patiently for Him, as we see in verse 7. And if we look at our own lives, I'm sure that there are many times when we too find ourselves falling into the trap of becoming angry at others, or envious of someone else's situation when we should be trusting God. That is the true source of this problem that we all face. Because it is not the situations that we face or the people that we encounter that cause us to envy others or to seek our own justice, it's actually the problem of sin in our hearts as we seek to take God's place in judging others. David points this out in verse two when he talks about the fate that will befall the evil ones, 'for like the grass they will soon wither and die away'. In short, God will deal with them and not us.

## **II. Help (v.3-7)**

So if we go back to the doctor metaphor, David has diagnosed that there is a serious issue with our hearts, and if we stopped there it would not be good news. However, he also proposes the medicine, the remedy for our situation. Because David, in his instruction, does not simply tell us what not to do. He also points us to what we need to do instead. Have a look at verses 3, 4 and 5. David uses strong verbs like 'TRUST in the Lord and DO good', 'DWELL in the land and ENJOY safe pasture', 'DELIGHT yourself in the Lord' and 'COMMIT your way to the Lord', 'TRUST in Him'. The antidote for this problem that we have in situations of worry, envy and anger is not to look deeper into our own hearts, but to look to God instead. In these verses, there are some absolutely amazing promises. And if we believe them, they will transform the way that we live our lives. Consider verses 3 and 4, I think that it's worth reading them again: 'Trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart'. This is heart surgery. If we look closely at these verses, God has not promised to improve the situation or to take away the evil ones from verse one, at least not initially. But He has promised to change our hearts so that we delight in Him and not in our circumstances.

Instead of trusting myself and trying to take action myself, I can trust in a God who is able to do infinitely more than I can imagine. Take a second to think that through. Instead of taking all of the anxiety or envy or anger and responsibility upon yourself, you can trust in God to deal with that for you. What a blessing to have a God who loves us in such a deep and

personal way that He cares about the individual circumstances of our lives and He promises to walk with us and carry us through these times of trouble.

This is such a transformation, such a deep change in our normal attitudes and actions that this will be visible for everyone to see in how we live our lives. Because that is how Jesus lived, trusting in God the Father for everything and living to see His will done here on the earth. In verse six, David makes it clear that if we too live like this, trusting in the Lord and committing our way to Him, then it will be clear to everyone who it is we serve. 'He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn' verse 6. As Christians, this is a great chance for us to show our faith in a practical way. Trusting in God instead of being anxious or envious of others will point friends, family and colleagues to the ultimate example of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is our righteousness, and we can follow how He did the will of God throughout His life, even up to the point of death.

But I'm not saying that it will be easy. Often trusting God above ourselves is costly. And it often requires us to wait, as David mentions in verse 7 'Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him'. I don't know about you, but I often have my own timetables and deadlines of when I expect action, especially when I'm suffering and things are not going my way. And it's not easy to wait. But by remembering our righteousness in Jesus, we can take heart that God keeps His promises and we can continue to trust in Him.

### **III. Hope (v.10-11)**

And I want to finish by looking at verses 10 and 11, because of all the promises that we have looked at in this psalm, this is perhaps the most encouraging. We have seen the problem of sin that is within our hearts and how we are saved from this by trusting in God through the person of Jesus. However, in the last verses that we are going to look at here, David reminds us that although in our earthly life there will be hardship and there will be evil, in a little while that will be finished as we look towards eternal life and the promise of being together with God for all eternity. And this in many ways is the ultimate cure for worries and anxieties, to know that there is security in eternity with God. It is the ultimate cure for envy, to know that in a little while we will be together with Jesus and that we will lack nothing, that there is nothing that can compare to being with Him, that's there's nothing that could be better than being with Him. And the ultimate cure for anger at injustice is to know that ultimately God will judge those who commit evil acts. It's not up to us, it's up to God. Just to drive home the point, to make sure that we don't miss what he is saying, this is all confirmed when David writes that, in verse 11 when he's talking about Heaven, "the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace." In complete contrast to the turmoil of this life, we have an eternity of great peace to look forward to. That sounds pretty good to me.

But this is not simply a case of reminding ourselves every once in a while that we are going to heaven, it is a conscious decision that we must take to turn our minds from the here and now to eternity. Because living with our minds focused on spending eternity with God will shape every decision that we make in our lives. How do I spend my money? How do I spend my free time? What do I talk about with my friends, family and colleagues? How can I let the most people possible know about the gospel and being saved by Jesus? Because ultimately when we understand how good it will be to have that chance to live forever with Jesus, we won't want to keep that to ourselves. We will want everyone to know about it!

And so that is my challenge to you all this morning as a church. To live with a mind and a heart focused on the eternal life that awaits us if we trust in Jesus. Not ignoring the anxieties

and challenges of this life, especially in the face of ever-changing Covid-19 restrictions, but to examine your hearts when anxiety strikes. To live in these times knowing with certainty that in a little while we will enjoy great peace when we are together with God for all eternity. And I will close this time in the word by reminding us of what is waiting for us. I'm going to read the apostle John's vision from Revelation 21 to once again remind us about the New Heaven and the New Earth to come. So let's listen, or read along as I believe that it's going to appear on the screen. Revelation 21:

*Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

So this week, if things get tough, or even if they don't, I challenge you to set your mind on the New Heaven and the New Earth. Because what a promise we have to look forward to! Amen.

**Hymn of Reflection:** IPH 485 Knowing You

**Prayers for Others:** Ken Mok

**Closing Praise:** 'Tis So Sweet To Trust In Jesus

#### **Announcements**

- **3D Groups:** Please complete the emailed questionnaire by tomorrow.
- **Dublin Women's Convention:** 3 October, 10-12.30, €5, <https://tinyurl.com/Hab2020>

**Benediction:** And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now, and for evermore. Amen.