

## THOUGHTS FOR THE NEW YEAR FROM THE 37<sup>th</sup> PSALM

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Once I was talking to my brother about how listening to the news was bothering me. He told me in effect, “When the news is bothering me I shut it off.” I tried it. I felt better. My brother reminded me that so much of what goes on in the world is out of our control, so why get ourselves worked up over those things? We don’t bury our heads in the sand and pretend there’s nothing bad in the world. We face reality, do what we can, and leave it in the Lord’s hands. God is taking care of it. This is the overall message of the 37<sup>th</sup> Psalm. There are always problems in the world. We need God’s help so that we don’t let those problems make us anxious and angry, and keep us from recognizing and being thankful for all the good that God is doing for us, and the reality that God, in His wisdom and love, is taking care of us. On this January first we turn to the Word of God for **THOUGHTS FOR THE NEW YEAR FROM THE 37<sup>th</sup> PSALM.**

Three times in Psalm 37 God says, “*Do not fret.*” Do you think He’s trying to tell us something? “Fret” in the original means, “*be hot, be kindled, burn,*” which leads to “*be angry, be incensed.*” We would say, “Don’t get yourself all fired up!” It happens when something upsets us and we keep thinking about it. We feed those flames of anger inside of us, and we can get burning mad.

The Lord says, “*Do not fret because of evil men. ... Do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.*” We can insert any number of people into that scenario: “Oh, those politicians!”/“Oh, that neighbor”/“Oh, that family member”/“Oh, that co-worker!” (and on and on). Some of the things other people do can really bother us and cause us trouble and impact our lives for the worse.

God says, “*Refrain from anger and turn from wrath*” (literally from the original: “*turn from hot displeasure, turn from burning anger*”). (There’s that getting fired up again!) “*Do not fret – it leads only to evil.*” Not only can we let our anger eat us up inside, we can let our anger lead us to do bad things that we would otherwise not do. And that can be very bad. The Bible says, “*Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity*” (Eph. 4:26-27). There is a place for righteous anger over someone who does something that God says is wrong. But we need to be careful that we don’t hold onto our anger and keep dwelling on what made us angry. If we do, we’ve opened the door for the devil. He’s happy to step right on in and feed our feelings and try to make us blow the situation out of proportion and overreact and carry a grudge.

One ditch our flesh would have us fall into is fretting over the evil things people do. Another ditch is wishing we could do some of it, too. The Lord tells us, “*Do not ... be envious of those who do wrong.*” Our flesh says, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.” Our flesh tempts us to think how nice it would be to be worldly and live for wealth and have the world like us because we’re like they are and not hassle us for our Christian beliefs. But God calls us to our senses: “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not*

*in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” – 1 John 2:15-17. Envy the world?? Join the world in turning away from God?! That is a price that is too high to pay.*

We do what we can to have good leaders in our country. And in general, as Christians in the world as we have opportunity, we speak out about what God says is sinful, and speak up for what God says is right and good. At the same time it's not good for us to worry and fret about bad leaders and bad people and bad things that are happening in the world. We can get so focused on what we see going on in the world around us that we're not trusting in God the way we should. God isn't the cause of evil. It's not God's fault that evil people do evil things. In His own way and in His own time, God is taking care of things. Evil leaders and evil people rise and fall. But God always remains. Our worrying and fretting isn't going to change a thing. It's only going to make us feel worse. Keep looking to God, who is in ultimate control of people and nations and events in the world.

We're told, *“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.” “Like the grass they will soon wither.” “The power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous. ... all sinners will be destroyed; the future of the wicked will be cut off.”* God deals with the wicked; sometimes in this life, always in the life to come. As the psalmist says, *“My feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ... Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. ... All day long I have been plagued. ... When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end” – from Psalm 73 (vv. 2-3, 13, 14, 16-17).*

The Lord tells us, *“Turn from evil and do what is good.”* When we find ourselves dwelling on our troubles and thinking angry thoughts and being anxious about things, we need to ask God to help us turn away from all of that and turn to Him instead. He tells us, *“Consider the blameless, observe the upright.”* It's encouraging to get together for Christian fellowship. Gathering together with each other reminds us that the Lord still has His believing people in the world. It's encouraging to see the example of fellow believers who trust in the Lord and walk closely with Him. As the Lord is helping them, so He will help us to trust more in Him and walk closer to Him.

We're told, *“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.”* When we're tempted to fuss and fret over things, we need to ask our Lord's help to be silent and look to Him and wait patiently while His will is being done. We're told, *“Trust”* (from the original also *“Be secure, Have confidence, Feel safe”*) *“in the Lord and do what is good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.”* Place your trust in God who promises us, *“[I] ... will not forsake [My] faithful ones.”* It's not good for us to dwell on the many things in the world that are bad, and how we wish that things were different, and being anxious over them. Instead our Lord wants us to keep looking to Him and appreciating and enjoying all the blessings He is giving us in our lives right now. King Solomon, with all of his wisdom and wealth, said simply, *“I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God”* (Ecc. 3:12-13).

We're told, "*Delight yourself in*" (the idea from the original being "*Be happy about, Take your delight in*") "*the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.*" Instead of being anxious and unhappy because of all the troubles in the world, we can be happy that we have the real, lasting treasures in life: we have been given faith in Jesus who died on the cross to save us, God is our Heavenly Father, God loves us, God helps us and guides us and protects us, and God blesses us in every area of our lives. As we "*take our delight in the Lord,*" He promises to "*give [us] the desires of [our] heart*" – the things He knows that will make us truly happy. Anyone and anything can change. But "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*" (He. 13:8). People and things that happen can let us down and hurt us. But God is always there for us, and He'll only do for us and give us what He knows is best for us.

We're told, "*Commit your way*" (from the original also "*Commit the course of your life*") "*to the Lord; trust*" (from the original also "*be secure, have confidence, feel safe*") "*in Him and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.*" As Jesus suffered so unfairly for us on the cross, the Bible tells us, "*He did not retaliate; ... He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to [His Father] who judges justly*" (1 Pet. 2:23). Sometimes unfair and maybe even terrible things happen to us. Those who cause it may never realize it or admit it to themselves and to us. But God knows. Leave it all in His hands. God will help us let go of the bitterness and the hurt, and be at peace within ourselves over it.

We're told, "*Those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land ... and enjoy great peace.*" When God says that we "*will inherit the land,*" the idea seems to be that God will always be there to take care of us and provide for us. He promises, "*If the Lord delights in a man's way, He makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with His hand.*" The Lord doesn't promise that nothing bad will ever happen to us. He does promise that when something bad happens to us, He'll never let it be more than we can bear. The Lord promises to always make a way for us (1 Cor. 10:13). The Lord promises that we will "*enjoy great peace*" in knowing that our sins are forgiven, that He is watching over us and providing for us, that He is causing all things in our lives to always and eventually work out for our good (Ro. 8:28), and that He will take us to heaven one day.

"Dear Lord, as we begin a new year, and at all times, forgive us when we fret and are anxious and upset over things. Help us to do what we can, place everything into Your hands, and trust in You. Thank You for saving us through Jesus. Thank You for all the blessings You continually give us. Give us a peaceful, humble, joyful trust in You." Amen.