

Wait on God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 August 2023

Preacher: Tom Muir

[0 : 00] So, I believe that you've been looking at some of the Psalms in the evenings. In Esk Valley, we've been looking over the summer at some passages in the Bible that help us think about prayer.

So tonight, I thought I'd just put the two together. We're going to use some of Psalm 37 to help us think about one aspect of prayer.

And it may well be an aspect of prayer that if you've experienced but not necessarily found easy, and that is waiting prayer. So is waiting, I mean, we've all experienced waiting in one way or another, is waiting always a chore for you?

Secondly, is waiting in prayer ever a good thing? I mean, you know the experience, maybe even if you're not a Christian, sometimes people who are not Christians speak about throwing out a prayer, where do they go?

How long do you wait for? What happens in the interim? And how do we feel about it? It's not always an easy process to understand or to live with.

[1 : 13] Now this Psalm, as you may well know, as one of the Psalms and as they all are, is very old. And yet, it speaks exactly into that kind of scenario because it's a human scenario.

It's experienced by people thousands of years ago. It's experienced by you and I tonight, whether you're just waiting for a bus, frustrating, whether you're waiting for the end of an interminable car journey with your children, even more interminable perhaps for them, or whether you're waiting for something that you prayed for and you don't know how to process it.

What I hope as well as as we look at this passage, we're led into what God wants us to understand about prayer in His presence and gospel truth as well.

So we're going to try and use this ancient song, prayer, Psalm, and connect it to what Jesus has to say to you and I about the experience of prayer that He wants you to know is so necessary and meaningful for your tomorrow and all your daily life stuff.

So briefly, here's the three things that I want us to look at, all sees, don't always do that, but I just decided to tonight. Hopefully it'll help us remember what we're going to be thinking about.

[2 : 29] We want to think about the context of the Psalm, specifically the angst that's going on at unrighteous people who seem to be doing better than we are.

So the Psalm is born out of a sense of frustration and waiting to see what God is going to do about it. So the context, secondly, the core of the Psalm and really what I want us to think about. And I think the core for us tonight at least is in verse 7.

In verse 7, it says, be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him. So that's kind of the epicenter of what I want us to be thinking about. And thirdly, the comfort or the consolation.

How does it help? What difference does it make to us? And in brief, the comfort that we receive is the knowledge that God's long-term plans benefit the faithful.

So that's more or less what we're going to look at tonight. Context. Let's spend a little bit of time thinking about the context. Now this is a Psalm written by David, if you don't know anything about David. He is a big player, if you like, in the Old Testament.

[3 : 33] Famous king wrote many Psalms, a bit of a hero of the faith in the Old Testament. And yet he didn't always find things easy and also his life wasn't always smooth because he himself didn't always get things right.

In fact, he made a mess of certain situations. So he's somebody who in many ways is not like us. He was a king of ancient Israel, but he's a human being. He lived with sin and he lived with trouble.

And he's writing this Psalm out of a sense of real angst. And the angst is what is sometimes a bit of a shared experience in the Old Testament.

How come the unrighteous, if we, it sounds trivial to say, the bad guys prosper when I feel like I'm getting nowhere.

Now you don't have to be a Christian to understand what that's like. Again, that's a human experience. People in all kinds of scenarios can find themselves saying, things aren't going the way I thought they would.

[4 : 33] I thought if I came to this place and worked really hard, I'd be further up the ladder by now. How come they're further up the ladder? Or however you apply that socially in your street, in your neighborhood, no matter how hard you try, whichever dinner party you throw, you always get a feeling that people are a little bit reticent to accept the invite or maybe you're the last one to be chosen, as we were hearing about from Corey earlier.

All of these kind of things can make us feel really bad because again, we're human and these kind of things matter to us. Now the specific context that this frustration is borne out of in the Old Testament, and we need to understand this a little bit, the Old Testament in some ways worked a bit more black and white in terms of how you might expect life to go if you were a faithful one, a believer in God, one of God's people, the Israelites, in that God would say to his people, things like, if you will obey me, I will bless you, but if you disobey me, you'll experience a curse of some kind or trouble in your life.

That's a very broad brush statement, but sometimes we find that kind of content in the Old Testament because in the Old Testament in particular, God was working in a particular time and space to do a particular thing with these people in that after the fall, the breakdown, the calamitous breakdown in our world history which led to our estrangement from God, even our enmity with God, God was working with this particular people to put them in a particular place under his governance for their good so that they could be at peace, so that they could know the blessing of worship, the knowledge of God, and they could freely express worship to him.

And he was saying, look, listen, if you follow me, if you know me, if you trust me, if you live the way that I want you to, so as to honor me, which is what you were made for, then you'll be blessed.

But what we find sometimes in a Psalm like this, which we might call a wisdom Psalm, but it's one of the kind of categories of the Old Testament in particular, is an entry into the kind of gray areas where it doesn't always seem to work like that, at least certainly in the short term, where the Sammest or whomever may say, but those bad guys, those unrighteous who care nothing for my beloved God seem to be prospering.

[7 : 06] And I'm surrounded by disappointments, and my life plan is stuck at stage two, and I thought I'd be at stage 10. Now, without going into all the detail, David faced a lot of trouble in his life at times literally fleeing for his life, so you can get a sense of why at times he might have felt like that and expressed the kind of feelings he does in the Psalm.

Just to take note of the feelings, and again, to delve into the Psalm, what actually happens when we feel like that? Again, this is such a human experience.

So like what goes on in our hearts and our minds when we perceive that others seem to be doing better than we are? We don't really have to go much further than verse one, so take a look at verse one with me.

He says, first of all, fret not. So the Samm uses the word fret quite a few times. If you don't usually use the word fret about yourself or people around about you, you may use a word like stop stressing, or you can think of an alternative.

Because worry is a human condition. Again, we've already thought about that to a degree, haven't we? Fear, worry, anxiety, that's something that we have to take very seriously, and that's a good thing.

[8 : 25] Workplaces care for their employees. We care for our family members. We talk about self-care. Okay, because we need to, because we're vulnerable people and we have all kinds of fears and anxieties.

But the fretting that's going on in the Psalm isn't just the kind of stress, because like I'm not getting ahead in life as far as I thought I would do, like that fella over there who's stolen my thunder.

The word has a kind of anger behind it as well. So this is, the Sammish is saying, listen, be careful. Don't go down that route where you get all torn up inside.

You know what it feels like? You know what it feels like? Because sometimes, despite our best efforts, we find ourselves still awake at one in the morning, turning over that thing that happened with that person.

And we think, no, no, no, I don't need to, it's dealt with, I'm better than this, I can move on. And the next night, we're still awake at 1 a.m. because we're still turning over that thing that happened with that person. And we're mad about it because it's unjust.

[9 : 27] And maybe, for David the Sammish, it was unjust, the thing that happened to him. And maybe for you, you've experienced injustice, things that really, you do bring to God in there.

And you say, God, help me with this, because I don't know how to deal with this in my heart. It's really tearing me apart. So fret not yourself. And in the second line of verse one, we see another one.

Be not envious of wrongdoers. Envious. Why would we be envious of the person that we're internally criticizing? Well, because envy is very subtle.

And doesn't it just affect our hearts in all kinds of ways? So that even while we're feeling self-righteous and slightly mad about the person who we feel has what we think we should have, we're yearning after that prestige or that social kudos or that salary or whatever it is that we don't have.

Or we're envious of the Christian who seems to be doing well, maybe seems to be getting lots of answers to prayers. And we feel like we're still waiting.

[10 : 37] Maybe he's very subtle. And the psalmist wants to enter into that and say, I know. David probably experienced these things. And he can say to us, from down through the centuries, take care, guard your heart, and watch out for these things as they take root in your life.

The point is that when we enter into the psalm and think a little bit about the context, we're not thinking about context so much in terms of political, social issues going on in David's day. We're thinking about issues that go on in the human heart constantly down through the centuries.

And so I think we can immediately tap into the feelings that are coming out in the psalm. So context, that's the kind of the baseline context.

But the second thing I want to take you into now is where David goes with all of that. Because he's not just saying, this is rubbish, and sort of throwing out all his complaints.

As a man of God, which is what David was, someone who throughout his life wrestled with his own problems, but yearned for, I think, the company of the Good Shepherd, he takes us into the core of what it means to enter into this problem with God in prayer.

[11 : 52] And I think we can say this is about prayer. Let me take you to verse 7. As I said, I think verse 7, at least for tonight's purposes, acts as the core of this passage that we've been looking at.

What do we do when our hearts are like this at one in the morning? What do we do when we go to work and we can't stop thinking about whatever it is that's on our mind? Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

Frighten not yourself over the one who prospers in His way, over the man who carries out evil devices. He's saying take up waiting prayer before the Lord.

There's a couple of ways, there's probably more, but here's a couple of ways we can think about prayer and waiting. The first is if you simply ask a petition of God, like you say, God, I need this, and then you wait to see God's answer.

There's a lot we could say about that. It's a complex interaction, and maybe you have experience of it right now. You're waiting for something, but often that is a kind of... You're reaching outside of yourself to someone who you believe can help God, and you're asking about something outside of yourself, circumstances.

[13 : 04] But the second experience of waiting prayer I'd like to suggest we see more of in this Psalm and for tonight's purpose is the kind of waiting prayer where we place ourselves at God's feet and sit there, and we say, God, I need to be in Your presence.

And the difference, they're very closely linked, but the difference, and in some ways why this takes us deeper into the heart of prayer and into the knowledge of God, is because what happens here is that we're changed, or at least that's what God wants to do in our hearts.

So both are valid, we reach out to God and ask Him about things that are going on in our lives. He loves to hear from His children. You can take your prayers to God within His will, of course, praying for entirely selfish or sinful things.

God doesn't give us permission to do that. But this kind of prayer I think is being suggested here in verse 7 is where we take ourselves into the presence of God, and we say, I'm struggling to deal with the stuff that my heart can't deal with.

It's going to overtake me and submerge me in all kinds of bitterness or whatever. I need to sit at Your feet. I need to wait in Your presence, and You need to change my heart.

[14 : 29] Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him. We plug into God. If you take your device and plug it into a socket, you do that for a reason.

Your device needs charge. You get something. You receive from the current, and it benefits you. You can use your device again. Human beings need to plug into God to receive.

At times we need to ask Him for help with things, but we at base, crucially, just need Him. And that's what I think the psalmist is suggesting here.

That's this deeper level, if you like. Not saying the other isn't important, but here we find help then and perspective to look back out on our lives and deal with the stuff that we've got to deal with.

There are a number of different wisdom suggestions in this part of the psalm. I've zeroed in on verse 7, but let's just take a look at some of the other ones and notice what they are. But I'd like to suggest that as we just touch on them, verse 7 is crucial for them all.

[15 : 35] For example, verse 3, take a look at verse 3. It suggests you trust in the Lord and do good. You will know what is good when you know the Lord, but you will also be able to trust in Him when you know Him.

How do you know tonight here, Edinburgh, middle of the fringe, that God is worthy of your trust? Well, I suggest you know Him, and He wants you to know Him.

And one of the ways you can do that is to sit at His feet, so to speak, to enter into His presence, to say, Lord, I want to know you. I want to spend time in your presence.

Help me to trust in you. I'm just touching on these. Verse 5, commit your way to the Lord, very similar. Not going to say much more about that. Verse 4, back up to verse 4, delight yourself in the Lord.

Delight yourself in the Lord. Now to a society or a culture which thinks of God as largely irrelevant and perhaps even verging into the bad for society, this is counter-intuitive.

[16 : 44] You might receive quite a lot of pushback from a friend who wasn't a Christian. If you're not a Christian here tonight, you might be thinking, that's crazy. How can I delight myself in God? Do you know Him?

Do you know Him? Do you know what He's like? All the ways in which He's revealed Himself, as Corey said earlier, His story revealed to us of all that He's done in His world over the years and all the ways in which He's worked in many people's lives and is still working in people's lives to transform our lives, to redeem us and to forgive us, to put us back again on our feet and remake us in the likeness of Jesus, the brilliant one, what a good thing God is doing.

And we will be able to do this. We'll be able to delight in the Lord in the middle of your Wednesday which is going pear-shaped, if I can put it like that. And you just need five minutes to re-center and recapture a sense again of who am I, what's going on in my life?

Delight yourself in the Lord because He is delightful, because He's the covenant God who has come good on His promises, who has sent His Son to be our redeemer.

So all of this centers around, I think, or at least it flows out of our deeper practising, or at least our trying, because you know the great thing is God won't befriend you or save you, save you, depending on how well you do about this.

[18 : 09] But He gives you this so as you have access into His presence so that you can see all that He has done for you. Be still before the Lord so that you can delight yourself in the Lord.

So again, this is wisdom. This is biblical wisdom. And this is saying, put yourself in God's way. Put yourself in the way of seeing His glory, His goodness, hearing His story.

And you know, that will be the mechanism, if you like. That will be the feeder to help nourish you through your days when you deal with all the other stuff that you may be petitioning about, asking for help with.

And it will also help give you patience because you will know more and more the character of the God to whom you ask. So we've seen a little bit about the context and also the core of the Psalm where we're called into sitting before the presence of God.

And as I said, in many ways, what we're seeking here is that God would change us. God would change us. He is at work.

[19 : 19] We get a hint of this in this Psalm. You see the way in which it says, delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Verse five, commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him and He will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light. God has always been active in His world, bringing a people to know Him so that they can delight in Him.

It's what He made us for. He is still doing that, and we are called to trust in His process in our lives. Because we use that phrase, sports, like I hear it all the time.

I hear it in context with my football team who are terrible at the moment. And sometimes when, you can't see any short-term wins, and the fans are feeling fractious.

Management say, trust the process. We've got a plan. In other words, management say, well, we're doing some scouting. We've got some recruitment on the go. We've got a 20-step plan to improve the team, but you think to yourself, and the fans are all thinking similarly, I don't know if I can trust you, because all the other teams have got 20-step plans and better players, so they're obviously going to win.

[20 : 37] Human plans are fallible. They succeed, and they fail. And we don't always know which way it's going to be. But what this helps us do, be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him, is to say to God, God, remind me of the fact that your master plan has been fulfilled in Jesus and is and will be continually worked out in my life and across the globe until the day that Jesus comes again.

So context and the core of the Psalm, but thirdly and finally, comfort. Still you might be saying, what difference does this make?

How does this help? So let's spend a bit more time thinking about that. What actually changes when we wait upon the Lord, when we come into His presence in this kind of praying and plug into Him?

Well, firstly, how does the psalmist say He will be helped? He uses a particular phrase about a particular desire that might have seemed a bit strange when we read it through.

I thought, what's that all about? And you see it in verse three and verse nine. Verse three, trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.

[21 : 58] Dwell in the land. And verse nine, for the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

There's that land again. What's He talking about? Selfful to remember again that we're delving back into an Old Testament context with all that God was doing in that time and space.

And if you remember God's people in God's place under His rule being blessed, His promise to them was that if they were faithful, He would secure essentially a safe space for them where they could delight in His presence, where they could be secure, where life would be good.

I mean, they wouldn't be free from all of the bad things that happen, from death, from fear, from trouble, but essentially God promised them that He would establish them and give them a safe space to worship.

But what we need to do just now is, as we see the psalmist calling back that promise again of all that God was going to do and had promised to do, we need to take that.

[23 : 07] And if you like, pull it into our age, but particularly into the New Testament and in the fulfillment that Jesus brings to that promise. And into a particular passage that if you've got a Bible you might want to turn with me too in Matthew chapter 5, and a famous sermon that Jesus preached, which in many ways confounded the expectations of His hearers.

Jesus said things in such a way that people were shocked actually, the kind of priorities He talked about, the character of disciples He was looking for, the kind of life that people would get if they followed Him, and the extent of the blessings that He was promising really shocked people in Jesus' own day.

And I think it really would shock a lot of people today if they understood what it was that Jesus, what it is that Jesus is talking about. The psalmist has spoken about the land and the blessing, the reassurance, reassurance of knowing that with all of this stuff in life that's going on and with all of my sense of disappointment, remember the promises of God, and Jesus says, calling people to Himself and saying, I am the one you must follow, I am the sent one of God.

He says, Matthew 5 from verse 2, He opened His mouth and He taught them saying, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. So He doesn't say, blessed are those who are feisty and kick all the naysayers out of their paths or blessed are all the people who follow Me because I'll just give them what they want in life.

[24 : 51] He says, blessed are those who mourn, for they'll be comforted, because blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. They will inherit the earth. So almost identical.

In fact, I don't think we can think of Jesus preaching this sermon without His own internal reference to verse 11. The meek shall inherit the land.

In other words, Jesus is saying, and we need to understand, as we build a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament context, in the days after Jesus lived from the birth of the church as it went out and the acts of the apostles into our own day, we no longer look for the geographic land, do we, that we want God to situate us in, and there will be fine and safe and we can worship God.

We worship God in His growing spiritual kingdom, which covers the globe, is made up of people from all kinds of backgrounds, even in this room tonight. There are people from all kinds of different backgrounds.

But the point is where those people are, He is, and there they know blessing. And that happens because Jesus came. Jesus came, Himself became the sacrifice for sins to pay the penalty for our wrong, so that by faith in Him, we could be included into the family of God and could know His presence with us wherever we are.

[26 : 17] Any place you find yourself, God is with you if you look to Him and trust in Him. But of course, this anticipates a future promise that Jesus, another biblical writer, speak about elsewhere, that there is an eternal place that God has in store for you, which you need to know about maybe on your chaotic Wednesday.

And remember that even if things feel terrible right now, you hold fast to that promise of Jesus that He is with you now and He has a place for you for all eternity.

And what does He promise you there? He promises you peace. I mean, He promises you His peace now in that God is at peace with you and you will know peace forevermore in the new heavens and the new earth.

And so, King David didn't have a full vision of that, but we're told it in the Scriptures. We have the blessing of the promises of Jesus and the knowledge of all that He has done, the way in which He fulfills these kinds of promises for us.

And what that means is that even when we do feel maybe at a human level that we're not quite as far ahead as others or maybe God doesn't listen to us after all, we're counseled otherwise.

[27 : 38] And it means that we live with a different currency. We live with the promises of God. We live with the presence of God.

And that makes us rich. It means you may overflow with blessing because you know your Creator. You have deep fellowship with the Father. You can call out to Him any time of day.

You have His healing balm, His gospel balm ready for your soul and you have the eternal promises that He gives to you. And as we start to see this wonderful fruit of the gospel, I think just in finishing it highlights gospel realities in this Psalm that we can just touch on.

So you know, if you get time, go home tonight and just read this through again and see the way in which the gospel comes out in this Psalm. Verse 4, delight yourself in the Lord.

You are enabled to do that as you sit at the feet of Jesus because He says, and let me just read, in John 15 He says, if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.

[28 : 41] Abide. Stay there. Be in the presence of Him, abiding in His love. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

Now, we struggle to grasp that. Sure. And we'll always struggle to grasp it in this world, but we're counseled to go to Him and ask.

Also, delight yourself in the Lord. Verse 4, let me just touch on one final one. You've really already looked at it, but verse 11, the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.

Jesus also in John chapter 17 says this, in His prayer, we sometimes call it His priestly prayer to the Father, speaking about His disciples in all their vulnerabilities.

Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you love me before the foundation of the world.

[29 : 47] You are offered a different currency. It's better than all the riches the world can offer you. It's the comfort and counsel, the consolation, the peace, the love, the forgiveness of Jesus, the Son of God, who also promises you, if you put your faith in Him, to prepare a place for you for all eternity where you will know as the book of Revelation tells us freedom and peace and rejoicing forevermore.

Let me close there. I pray that as we finish, God will help us as we consider the week ahead with whatever it holds, that God will help us to consider how we may sit at the feet of Jesus and seek His help.

Let's pray. Help us, dear Lord. Thank you that you foreknew us, and so as it were, knew what you were getting into.

You know all our characters, all our stresses, all the even angry fretting that we do. Sometimes we can be so justified because life can be so harsh, sometimes so self-righteous, sometimes downright sinful.

Counsel us in those moments, we pray. And we speak the words of Psalm 130 as we conclude this prayer. I wait for the Lord.

[31 : 18] My soul waits, and in His word I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchman for the morning. More than watchman for the morning.

Amen.