

Faithful Living in Light of Eternity

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to our reading this morning and Fraser is going to be preaching to us from the Psalms. So turn to Psalm 37. We have plenty of visitor Bibles at the side, at the back. Do grab one of those. And page 466, if you're using one of the visitor Bibles.

And Psalm 37. Psalm 37.

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Psalm 37. but the wicked will perish the enemies of the lord are like the glory of the pastures they vanish like smoke they vanish away the wicked borrows but does not pay back but the righteous is generous and gives for those blessed by the lord shall inherit the land but those cursed by him shall be cut off the steps of a man are established by the lord when he delights in his way though he fall he shall not be cast headlong for the lord upholds his hand i have been young and now am old yet i have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread he is ever lending generously and his children become a blessing turn away from evil and do good so shall you dwell forever for the lord loves justice he will not forsake his saints they are preserved forever but the children of the wicked shall be cut off the righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever the mouth of the righteous utters wisdom and his tongue speaks justice the law of the god is in his heart he steps to not slip the wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death the lord will not abandon him to his power or let him be condemned when he's brought to trial wait for the lord and keep his way and he will exhort you to inherit the land you will look on when the wicked are cut off i've seen a wicked ruthless man spreading himself like a green laurel tree but he passed away and behold he was no more though i sought him he could not be found mark the blameless and behold the upright for there is a future for the man of peace but transgressors shall be altogether destroyed the future the wicked shall be cut off the salvation of the righteous is from the lord he is their stronghold in the time of trouble the lord helps them and delivers them he delivers them from the wicked and saves them because they take refuge in him well amen may god bless to us his word this morning do take your seats it's lovely to be with you this morning and do open your bibles up again to psalm 37 that's page 466 in our church bibles and it'll help if you have that in front of you as we look through this passage together now when i was in my fourth year at high school as part of our studying for our national five english exam we had to read a john steinbeck's classic novel of mice and men and none of us really had a clue what this book is about but they handed out the tattie old copies that had been passed down for years from year to year and we got one each and one of the girls at my table opened up her copy and on the front page there were three handwritten words george shoots lenny george shoots lenny why does it say that and thus the ending of this classic novel was in one fell swoop spoiled for us all now we live in a culture which claims to hate spoilers whenever there's a big new book or movie or tv show people go well out of their way to avoid people spoiling how it's going to end for them but i actually came across an interesting study a couple of years ago which found that actually people who had the ending spoiled for them in advance enjoyed films more than those who were watching them supposedly unspoiled so it seems that spoilers don't actually spoil things for us after all so if you haven't read of mice and men then you're welcome you can read it and enjoy it much more now see sometimes it's good to have the ending revealed in advance and this is the case in our psalm this morning david the psalmist he spoils how things end for us not to ruin our fun but to help us to live faithfully for god now as we look forward to living

forever with god in eternity now this psalm is an acrostic poem in the hebrew each pair of verses begins with consecutive letters of the hebrew alphabet and this allows david the psalmist to have a bit of structure even as he meanders between different ideas throughout the psalm but the difficulty for us to read it in english is that we don't see that and we wonder if there really is a clear structure but even though the psalm does meander back and forth and repeat various ideas there also is a little bit of a structure there is a repeated refrain throughout the psalm which i wonder if you spotted it's there in verse 9 verse 22 and verse 29 the wicked shall be cut off but the righteous shall dwell in the land forever the wicked shall be cut off but the righteous shall inherit the land and it's this stark future reality of how things end which is the key to understanding this psalm but not only the psalm is also the key to understanding how we as christians are to live life in the here and now in light of that eternal reality see these markers divide the psalm up for us but notice also how starkly they divide humanity there are two groups of people here and only two there's the righteous and the wicked those who trust in god and are righteous by their faith in the lord jesus and those who have rejected god it's black and white there's no fence to sit on in the middle no shades of gray to hide in there are two groups of people and all of us are in one group or the other and these two groups have very different eternal destinies don't they the wicked who have decisively rejected god in their lives well they are decisively and eternally cut off from god's presence while those who are righteous by their faith in jesus they will dwell with god in the land forever now this isn't an earthly land we're not setting our hopes here on a nice spot in kelvin grove park or neither is it a spot in the earthly land of israel no we like every man and woman of faith who has gone before us we are setting our hopes on a new heavens and a new earth to a land and a city not built by human hands but whose builder is god himself and it's this certain reality of where we'll spend our eternity which shapes how this psalm teaches us to live now in the present this psalm is really all about how we live faithfully for god as we look forward to living forever with god that's the central message and it's not unrealistic about the way the world is in fact this psalm shows as you probably noticed in quite vivid language the difficult realities of life now in this fallen world that we live in but it's the certainty of our eternal perspective perspective which helps us to have the right attitude here and now to god to the wicked to the everyday

things of life and to the future so we'll look at this psalm in these four sections as divided by that repeated refrain so firstly looking at verses one to nine living faithfully in relation to god and one of the things you might notice about this section if you scan your eyes over it again is that there are a lot of commands or direct instructions here there are actually more in this section of nine verses than the rest of the psalm put together fret not be not envious trust in the lord do good befriend faithfulness commit your way to the lord trust in the lord be still before the lord wait patiently before him refrain from anger forsake wrath lots of commands but at the center of this section is the lord himself most of these commands really concern the way which we relate to the lord our god and it's helpful i think that at the beginning of this psalm which has so much to say to us about life in a fallen world and living as christians in that world it's helpful that the focus is very much on god derrick kidner says on these verses that an obsession with enemies and rivals cannot simply be switched off but it can be ousted by a new focus of attention see it's faithfulness to god which is to be our first priority the antidote to fretting and worrying about the state of the world around us is to focus on god and david's clear message here is that we should grow to love faithful living that it won't just be a begrudged necessity for us as christians to do what god tells us to do but it will be a wholehearted joy as we grow more and more to love serving the lord look again at verses three and four they say trust in the lord and do good dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness delight yourself in the lord and he will give you the desires of your heart now i'm sure we all know and have heard many times the command to trust the lord and of course we should do that but i love these verses because whilst giving us that command they also give us the heart attitude which is to underlie that command to underlie our trust in the lord and it's one of delight isn't it so easy for us to fall into the trap of sort of reluctant or robotic obedience to god you know we've been at this game long enough now so we know what to do we go to church check yep prayer meeting check read our bibles check done great well if you're anything like me it's so easy to lose the delight in these wonderful things that god has given us and to start to do them only out of routine or because we know that we probably ought to but this sort of reluctant full faithfulness just isn't good enough the bible calls us to love living faithfully to befriend faithfulness and so faithfulness isn't just to be an acquaintance of ours not just something that we happen to bump into now and again no it's something we should seek out something we should love as with any friendship it's not going to flourish unless we're

intentional about spending time on it it won't grow unless we're putting effort in i play in a pipe band as many of you will know and when i was learning our pipe major used to have this refrain which she would repeat she said the more you practice the better you get the better you get the more you enjoy it the more you enjoy it the more you practice the more you put and so on and so on and so on but as much as this idea applies to pipes and drums it also applies to our faithfulness the more we practice the better we'll get the better we'll get the more we'll enjoy doing it and so on [14 : 56] and this is the idea i think is captured in verse four delight yourself in the lord and he will give you the desires of your heart now david hasn't slipped into some kind of prosperity gospel here isn't isn't saying that if we start to delight in the lord then he'll give us the house or the ferrari or the job or whatever it is that our heart desires no but rather as you spend time delighting in the lord obeying his commandments befriending faithfulness more and more if you do that you'll find that actually more and more the greatest desire of your heart become more aligned with the lord and as you go on doing this throughout your life you'll find that the greatest desire of your heart is in fact the lord himself to know him better to love him better and here's the wonderful thing the wonderful promise of this verse when our delight truly is the lord himself when he is the greatest desire of our hearts well he will not withhold himself from us but will give himself to us if we live with the right eternal perspective knowing that we have been predestined to spend an eternity with our lord in his presence and this delight will be the result we'll be able to be still and patient before the lord as we wait for him to bring about his new creation even if the present is filled with wickedness and evildoers and i don't know about you but i just find this so refreshing so good maybe you're naturally more positive than me but so often when i look at the state of the world the state of our society my tendency is towards fretting when i see evildoers prospering i do worry how good then that this psalm begins with this clear command to fret not this beautiful reminder to trust the lord to know that we will dwell with him forever and that the wicked will be cut off so befriend faithfulness delight in the lord so how do we live faithfully in light of a turntable step one is to focus on god and to delight in him but secondly as we look on to verses 10 to 22 we see david calling us also to live faithfully with a right attitude to the wicked see these verses show us in no uncertain terms both the danger but also the destiny of the enemies of god's people look how the wicked are characterized in these verses verse 12 they're plotting and vicious verse 14 they're seeking to bring down and kill the humble and the upright verse 16 they live with abundance of material possessions verse 21 they're dishonest and greedy it's not a pretty picture is it these wicked people are perpetuating evil and actually it seems to be working for them they're the ones that have the powerful weapons they're the ones who have an abundance of material possessions they're the ones who are making money by borrowing and taking and not giving back they're getting away with it and doesn't this resonate with our world today how many of the biggest companies and the wealthiest people in the world have built business empires and fortunes by exploiting the weak and poor by bringing them down how many world leaders have risen to the top with complete disregard for the weakest members of their societies they say that cheaters never prosper but it sure looks like they do

and because they prosper there's a temptation sometimes for us to join them sure we wouldn't resort to full-blown wickedness but maybe just a little bit of bending the rules here and there a little white lie here a little dose of dishonesty there that's the way to get ahead in life or at least that level the playing field for us a bit but david is clear that while this is a present reality it won't be an eternal reality because we know the end already the wicked shall be cut off and the poetry here in the psalm does not hold back showing us what that will look like verse 10 the wicked will be no more verse 15 their swords shall enter their own hearts verse 17 their arms shall be broken and verse 20 they will perish and vanish like smoke now these are brutal realities hard for us hard for us to read and hard for us to face up to but ultimately we know that this is good news in the new creation the land which we are hoping for as believers there will be no wickedness no enemies they will have perished they will be no more and in their place there will be as we see in verse 11 the delight of abundant peace and so seen in these terms this is glorious good news for us all the more so for people who at present really are facing the brunt of opposition and persecution as christian believers the eternal destiny of the wicked means the struggles we face as believers will not be forever look how god responds to the plotting and gnashing of teeth of the wicked in verse 13 he laughs god's not fazed he's not worried he's not unsure about whether he'll be able to overcome the wicked and actually cut them off no he laughs because even their present strength here in this life cannot compare to the power and strength of our god and he has fixed a day for judgment and on

that day the wicked and all their present glory will vanish like smoke and so alongside the description of the wicked that we see in these verses look also at how the people of god are to live by contrast verse 11 they're meek verse 16 they're content with what they have rather than striving for abundance verse 18 they have security in that they're known by the lord and verse 21 they're generous and giving people see these are the marks of real faithful christian living even in evil days it's not panic it's not fretting it's not trying to beat the wicked at their own game but rather meek content and trusting in god's provision for the present and his promise for the future knowing that god has fixed a day for judgment knowing that the wicked will be cut off this is how we should live now in relation to the wicked we don't return fire with fire we don't enter into this race to the top mercilessly trampling on anyone who might get in our way no we love our enemies we respond to anger with calm assurance to insults with grace to meanness with generosity and in all of this we are holding out and displaying to them the goodness of god at work in our lives perhaps when we think of enemies or the wicked

we immediately jump to some sort of caricature in our mind some sort of villain a real nasty piece of work but remember the reality that this psalm is making clear for us is that there are really only two groups of people the righteous and the wicked and so all of us i'm sure can think of people who we know and love who we see every day who fall into this camp of the wicked people whose present trajectory will see them cut off from god forever and if we're honest with ourselves we no doubt recognize the wickedness that's in our heart also and so we know that ultimately this judgment well it's what we deserve too we know that we have these streaks of anger and dishonesty exploitation within us and i think it's this that makes reading passages of judgment difficult and hard for us even though we know that ultimately it is good news it's easy to think of someone like hitler's arms being broken and being cut off it's easy to think of murderers and rapists falling on their swords but when it's your colleague or your sister or you suddenly it's not so easy suddenly the reality of the wicked being cut off forever takes on a tinge of sadness for us now it's hard to read these things but friends our only response to this can be to go on repenting ourselves and to go on loving those who don't yet trust and delight in the lord to live the way david has described in this psalm with meekness and generosity and love look again at verse 10 why do you suppose that the righteous man would be carefully looking for the wicked man we actually see the same thing again in verse 36 the righteous man seeks out the wicked man but though he sought him he could not find him well perhaps there's a suggestion here that although this man was wicked in response to that the righteous man had not cut him off in the present and that he was still doing his best to love him he still invited him round for dinner time to time and had conversations with him actually he'd been building up to inviting him to church and one day he goes to the door to find him to do so but there's no answer he's nowhere to be found see the hard reality for us to face is that for all those who don't yet know and trust in the lord jesus there will come a time when it is too late it's too late to respond to the gospel command whether it's their own death or whether it's the day when christ does come again in judgment there will be a time when all those who don't know and trust in christ will be cut off and so again this eternal reality really sharpens our focus and we see the urgency that there is for us as believers to hold out the goodness of the gospel of the lord jesus we really feel the weight of jesus words to us don't we when he tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us and so also if you're here this morning yourself and you have never responded to the command of the gospel to repent and put your trust in jesus then there's urgency for you to do so today there will come a time when it's too late for those who will turn back to god and who do trust in him there is real assurance of forgiveness of salvation and yes it might mean sacrificing a lot in this life giving up your prospering temporarily but ultimately it means joy and delight for all eternity however while it may be the wicked who seem to prosper in this life the third section of the psalm looking at verses 23 to 29 reminds us of the real blessings there are here now for god's people for those who have bowed the knee to christ as we see david telling us how to live faithfully in relation to the everyday things of life yes it's true that our ultimate hope and our ultimate home is indeed not in this world but in the new creation that doesn't mean that we just check out of this life as if it doesn't matter and we just lie low until the coming judgment sigler ferguson once said that some people think that christianity is all pie in the sky when you die and he went on and said well i'm sure there will be pie in the new creation when we die but there's also pie now and it's good too so we need to be careful as christians that we don't export all of the blessings of god to only being true of the new creation as if god had somehow just left us here to suffer in misery for a while before whisking us off to the new creation at some point in the future yes it's true that it's only there that we'll know the fullness of god's blessings

we'll know the fullness of these things without the staining of sin but there are still real tastes of god's goodness his blessing now in this life as we live obediently delighting in the lord the giver of these blessings and so in these verses david looks back with the experience of years and he reflects that in all his years verse 25 he has not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread this doesn't mean that it won't be any difficulty but verse 24 even though there inevitably will be stumbles and hurdles to overcome god will never leave or forsake his people he will never let go of our hands and so with this knowledge we as christians are to live together now in the present as we see laid out so beautifully in these verses verse 26 the righteous man is ever landing generously his children follow in his footsteps becoming a blessing both to him and the community verse 27 the righteous man turns away from evil and does good for this is the manner in which he's going to dwell forever in the new creation yes only in the new creation will there be perfect justice as the lord loves yes it will only be there that we are able to fully and finally turn away from anger and to do good at all that we do it will only be there that our hearts are truly filled with generosity and we share without grudging but it's also true isn't it that even as we long even as we live in this life we long for God's will to be done here now as it is in heaven the lives of Christians living in community together should be a real foretaste of what we're looking forward to in the new creation isn't this how

God administers his provision for us here and now he provides for his people through his people God doesn't just snap his fingers and suddenly bread appears on our table but he does provide us with the ability to work and to make bread and he provides us with a family and a church family who'll invite us over for a meal and feed us God doesn't just zap us with some warm fuzzy feeling of love but he gives us a community of people who will love us who will be there to grab our hands when we fall and to keep us going so yes the Christian life involves difficulty and struggle David's clear about that in this sermon he himself knew his fair share of difficulty in his life but Jesus tells us there is no one who has left house or brother or sister or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecution and in the age to come eternal life so perhaps this is a prompt for us to think about the way we're living the everyday life now as a church family in light of what we know to be true eternally a prompt for all of us to think about whether we are doing all we can to be a blessing to one another are we generous with our time and our possessions are our children a blessing to us and to our church family are our front doors open to our brothers and sisters to welcome them in now thankfully these things really are true for us here and I myself have been truly blessed by so many of you who are sitting in this room and those at

[32 : 54] Queen's Park and Bath Street as well these moments of love and fellowship which we share together are foretaste of what we will enjoy eternally when we are gathered together feasting together with each other and with the Lord so the next time you are round the table together with fellow believers perhaps even this afternoon at lunch why not pause and think about that to give thanks to God for all that we have this is the way we will be dwelling for eternity so let's start getting used to it now let's enjoy it now these present blessings that we have well this whole psalm as we've been seen has been urging us to live faithfully for God as we look forward to living forever with God we've seen how this shapes how we relate to God how we relate to the wicked how we relate to the everyday but in the last section of this psalm from verse 30 to 40

David really drives this point home by telling us how to live faithfully in relation to the future see as Christians in the broadest possible sense there is no real uncertainty about the future because we've heard the spoilers we know that ultimately death will not be the end for us but that when we die we will go to be with the Lord and dwell with him forever and this is the key difference between the righteous and the wicked and it's picked up in these verses again verse 37 and 38 there is a future for the man of peace but transgressors shall be altogether destroyed the future of the wicked shall be cut off our future is not in doubt ultimately God will help and deliver us verse 40 he will not let our steps slip verse 31 he will not abandon us to the power of the wicked verse 33 and having this certainty about the future allows us always to look forward in faith and in hope and not in fear and fretting verse 35 paints the picture of a wicked ruthless man who is spreading like a laurel tree and I think the idea is that it's like some kind of clinging plant which just loves to spread and get its roots in everywhere my grandmother's house has ivy growing up the walls and whilst I do think it's very pretty it's a nightmare to try and cut back because it just seems to get its roots into the

stonework into the woodwork and the frames of the window and it's just a total nightmare well this can be what wickedness feels like it feels like it's just spreading its roots everywhere and that we'll never be able to cut it out so we can worry that the future just holds more and more and more and more wickedness forever but not so look at verse 36 the wicked man didn't keep growing endlessly he passed away and behold he was no more though I sought him he could not be found and so what's the message for us as Christians how do we live faithfully now in relation to the future well the promise is not that there won't be days of difficulty wickedness will spread for a time there will be some verse 32 who seek to persecute

Christian believers there will verse 39 be times of trouble but in all of this the Lord will not abandon us though he will be our stronghold in the time of trouble and he will deliver us from the wicked and save us because he is our refuge and so verse 34 we wait for the Lord and we keep his way we trust in his timing and we remain true to his word and when we wait for the Lord we wait with certainty it's not like when you wait for a bus and you're not sure whether it's actually ever going to show up no he will exalt you to inherit the land and the wicked will be cut off the Lord is not slack concerning his promise he's not slow but he's patient not wishing that any should perish see it's not for us to know exactly when

Christ will come again but we do know that that day will surely come it's closer today than it was yesterday and it'll be closer still tomorrow perhaps yesterday some of us were longing and praying come Lord Jesus perhaps you pray that every day well amen to that come Lord Jesus but as we wait we know that there is purpose in our waiting because God is in control and in the extra day that we've waited since we prayed that prayer yesterday across the world more people who were living in wickedness and in darkness have turned to the shining light of the gospel and have bowed the knee to Jesus by the grace of God there are more people in heaven today than there were yesterday and there'll be more again tomorrow and every day until he comes so until that day we go on living faithfully in light of what we know to be true eternally when the ending is clear we're freed from fretting and from fear and instead we get on with what

God has given us to do we delight in the Lord we love our enemies we bless each other in the everyday things of life and we look to the future with hope knowing that God is in control delight yourself 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 act amen let's pray together father we thank you that you have given us clarity and certainty in your words about eternal matters we thank you for the encouragement that this gives us now in the present as your people to live without fear and fretting and father help us to trust you through the difficulties you place in our paths help us to love the people you have placed in our lives and to go on doing so until you exalt us to dwell with you in glory forever in Jesus name amen