

Why do evil people succeed?

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[0 : 0 0] And we're working through, by the way, a number of psalms that can be applied to a work situation. Now, all of us work, whether it's paid or unpaid, whether it's formal or not.

And the Bible has a lot to say about work. And what we're going to do is not look at everything these psalms say, because they do say a lot, especially Psalm 37, which Ryan read for us, which we're going to look at today.

We're going to look particularly at the parts of it which can help us to have a godly view when we go to work on Monday morning and for the rest of the week. But to start, before we look at Psalm 37, I have a bit of a confession to make.

And I haven't really told many people this. It's something I did when I was a kid, a long, long time ago. I used to help a friend do pamphlet deliveries on our bicycle around Fischock.

Look, we used to go on our bikes, and a company used to pay us, well, he used to pay him, my friend, and he used to share some of the money with me. I'm not sure how much they paid him. He probably gave me a small pittance and made me do most of the work.

[1 : 0 5] But anyway, we did these pamphlet deliveries, and they gave us this pile of pamphlets to get through. But it just so happened that even after we covered the area that we were supposed to cover with these pamphlets, we were left with a pile about so big that we didn't know what to do with.

And my friend told me just to dump them, to dump them over a wall somewhere. And I said to him, but surely we should just finish the delivery, and we've covered the area, but there's more houses.

We can just carry on delivering until we finish. And he said, no, no, no, you don't do that. That would be silly. And I asked him why, and he said, because the company that hires him always gives him more pamphlets than he can realistically deliver.

Because apparently they did this for all the delivery jobs because they expected that a percentage of the pamphlets would be dumped, because that's what delivery people did. And so by dumping them, we were just doing what the company expected anyway.

And to me as a kid, it sounded like a reasonable argument. And so I do confess that I did take that pile of pamphlets, and I dumped it in the back garden, overgrown garden, of an old man, who probably never would have discovered it.

[2 : 1 1] It might still be there to this day, in fact. Now, of course, looking back as a Christian, and in light of what we saw last week, that we do everything as to the Lord, the Lord's our boss, no matter what work we do.

I wouldn't do that today, you'd be pleased to know, as a Christian. I would finish the job. However, that little scenario where my friend persuaded me that the best thing to do was the wrong thing, to get the job done, it served to introduce me to the working world, and how in many work situations we'll find ourselves expected to do things that aren't right.

Pressured to do things that aren't right. You know what I'm talking about? If you've worked, no matter what job you've done, and you've worked with other people, sooner or later, you'll have some kind of pressure to do something that your conscience tells you is not the right thing to do, and yet people expect it.

It's the done thing, and you're pressured to do it. Whether it's dumping pamphlets, or whether it's bending the truth to sell a product, or manipulating figures in the books to dodge some tacks.

People often expect us to do wrong in order to get along in the working world. And so as Christians, how do we go out to work?

[3 : 32] How do we work in a world like that, where there's always this pressure to compromise in order to get the job done? How do we maintain godly values like we're supposed to in a world that assumes, even rewards people for not maintaining godly values?

Well, I think Psalm 37 has the answer for us, and that's why I want us to look at it this morning. And I think Psalm 37 and its lessons are such an important, it's such an important psalm to incorporate into our working life, and in the world in general.

Even if you're retired and you don't find yourself working much, there's some truths in this psalm which will apply to all of us. It's a psalm of David, and it's a psalm that he wrote as he was considering the evil of the world around him.

And not only how evil affected him personally, but how evil people so often succeeded in their evil. And he was frustrated by this.

And he was asking, you know, why keep following God's ways when the world's ways seem to work better? And that is a question that I think we will often ask ourselves out there in the workplace, out there in the world.

[4 : 45] Why? When we look at the world around us, when we see people succeeding by totally ignoring God, we might ask ourselves, why keep following God's ways when the world's ways seem to work better? Well, Psalm 37 answers that question.

Now, first I want us to consider just the situation that he's writing about here. He begins verse 1, Do not fret because of those who are evil, or be envious of those who do wrong.

Now, why does he say that? Why would we fret or be envious of them? Well, he elaborates later in verse 7, he says, Do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

So, the reason we might fret or be envious of people who do evil and make wicked schemes is because those schemes actually work. And those wicked people actually succeed.

Later, he says, I've seen wicked people like flourishing green trees. And it's true, isn't it? People do get along by doing wrong in our world.

[5 : 46] And it's frustrating when we see it, isn't it? And it can make us anxious when we see wicked people succeeding and continuing to succeed and not getting what we know they deserve.

And it's not just at work. It's on a broader scale as well when we read the news, isn't it? Think of our own country's political situation. People in power who are openly corrupt, and yet they're still in office and still benefiting from it.

Doesn't that frustrate you? And not only frustrates you, doesn't it make you anxious for the future of our country? If you have children and you look at the newspapers and you look at the politics, doesn't it make you anxious for your children's future?

Doesn't it? Well, of course it does. It tends to. And yet David, here in the psalm, he was by no means ignorant of evil people.

He suffered firsthand at the hands of evil people. And he saw wicked people succeeding in their schemes. But even he can still say, just chill, people.

[6 : 56] Just calm down. Don't fret. Don't fret. In fact, three times he uses that phrase in this psalm. Don't fret. And I think he repeats it because it's something we need to be reminded of over and over again.

Do not fret because of those who are evil. Verse 1. Verse 7. Do not fret when people succeed in their way. Verse 8. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath.

Do not fret. It leads only to evil. I might get into trouble for this. But I saw a video this week. You may have seen it.

It was going around on social media. A guy in Seapoint during the Cape Town storm. He was in his car. He was trying to video. You saw that. People who saw that are laughing. He was trying to video the waves coming over.

And then this huge monster wave came over. And he was obviously in the car with his girlfriend or his fiancée or his wife. His significant other. And this wave comes over.

[7 : 56] It smashes into the car in front of them. And you hear his female companion going, It's hitting the car. It's hitting the car. Move. Get out of there. It's hitting the car. And she's going crazy. And you hear him.

He's saying, Calm down. Calm down. It'll be fine. I just need you to relax. Just relax. Just relax. And that's actually even more interesting than watching this wave.

Hearing this interaction between the guy who's videoing it and his significant other. Now, that's not to say anything about females. It was just that situation. Sometimes, of course, the situation is reversed.

One person is fretting. And the other person is trying to calm them down. You've seen it often, whether it's the man or the woman. And here David says, That's the same for us. We see the evil in the world. And we're going, Oh, what's going to happen?

What's going to happen in the future? I don't know what's going to happen. The world's so terrible. And David is here in the psalm saying, Just calm down. I need you to relax. I need you to chill. Okay, that's what the psalm is about.

[8 : 55] And he repeats it over and over again. And it's in verse 8, actually, we see a great reason why. And this is very important. Why we must just chill and calm down in the face of a wicked world.

And verse 8 says, Refrain from anger. Turn from wrath. Do not fret. It leads only to evil. And that is a good reason, if nothing else, why we should calm down in an evil world.

You see, when we are anxious about the ways of wicked people succeeding, we will eventually, inevitably, adopt the attitude, Well, if you can't beat them, join them.

Even if not consciously, we think that. When we see it and we get frustrated over and over again at evil in this world, sometimes we think, Well, the easiest way is just to succumb and join the club.

And we can very easily see this in the workplace. I think it happens in the workplace more often than we think. Without realizing, you'll tend to take on, absorb the attitudes and the values and the methods of your work colleagues, even if it's against your principles.

[10 : 01] It's just so much easier. Peer pressure is a huge factor in the workplace. We see it again in the political situation of our country at the highest national level, a workplace at the highest national level, which is parliament.

Parliament is a workplace like any other. It's just a particularly important workplace. And many MPs in our parliament who originally joined public service for good reasons, because they wanted to make a good difference to our country, now find themselves supporting a corrupt administration because they couldn't beat it.

So they joined it. You know what I'm talking about? It happens in all kinds of workplaces. And the same could happen to any of us more easily than we think.

We can succumb to the peer pressure of those around us. And even if we don't, though, even if we don't succumb to joining them, we will oppose them.

And sometimes the only way we can find to oppose them is to fight fire with fire and use the same means and tactics that they use. Wicked thoughts and schemes of our own.

[11 : 17] And that's why David says to fret over evil will always tend to evil yourself, will always tend you to use the same tactics.

And so he says that's the first reason not to fret. But then we're thinking, oh, but come on, David. You know, it's easy for you to say, look around at the evil and just chill.

But how do you expect us to just chill in the face of just so much wickedness in this world and evil people getting away with it? Well, that's where David says you've got to remember something else.

A truth that will help you. In fact, it's the key truth that will help you not to fret over evil people. And that is that justice will be done. That's what he assures us again over and over in this psalm.

That justice will prevail. It doesn't seem like it, I know. But David assures us that justice will still be upheld at the end of the day. Look at the following verses, for example.

[12 : 16] Verse 5. Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in him and he will do this. He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn. Your vindication like the noonday sun. Verse 8. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath.

Do not fret. It leads only to evil. For those who are evil will be destroyed. But those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. So in other words, the reason we need not fret over evil in this world and evil people getting away with it is because they won't ultimately get away with it.

They will pay for all the actions they've taken and all the choices they've made. While the righteous will ultimately be vindicated.

They'll be rewarded for their righteousness. Does that make sense? But you see, while it might not seem like it, we still live in a just universe.

That's what David wants to hammer home to us. It doesn't look like it. We look around in this world. It doesn't seem like a just world. And yet, you know what? It is still ruled by a righteous God. And that's what we've got to remember.

[13 : 25] When we look and see the injustice and the unrighteousness of this world. We've got to remember that there is a righteous God in charge. And God's laws, God's moral laws and their consequences are just as sure and certain as his physical laws, like the law of gravity.

So, if you, for example, climbed up, you went outside after the service, and you climbed up on a big ladder to the top of this church building, and you stepped off, I can be pretty certain what's going to happen.

You're going to fall to the ground. Because that's the law of gravity, right? I'm sure you wouldn't disagree. You can't decide one day that the law of gravity doesn't apply to you anymore. You can't wake up and say, you know what?

I don't think I'm going to obey the law of gravity today. It doesn't matter what you think. It's going to happen. You can't just ignore its consequences. Well, the same is true, the Bible says, of God's moral laws, the laws of right and wrong.

For example, those Ten Commandments up on the wall. Those two blue tablets there. You can't just decide they don't apply to you one day.

[14 : 39] You can't just wake up and decide that God's moral law doesn't apply. They're not optional. And they don't only apply to Christians either. They are absolute, unchanging laws of right and wrong that God has knitted into the fabric of this universe.

And to break them or ignore them will always have consequences, just like any other universal law. The only difference, of course, and this is why people think they can ignore them, is the timing.

You know, gravity, the law of gravity, has an immediate consequence, while God's moral laws have a delayed consequence. But that doesn't mean they're any less inevitable. And that's why we've got to remember in a world where doing wrong seems to pay.

And when we will be tempted to join this world in its ways, where we might fret over the success of evil people, the key is to what I say, what I call take the long view.

You know what I mean? Take the long view. Learn how to see things in light of eternity. And not just in your work situation, in life in general. One of the things that the Bible helps us to do and teaches us to do and trains us to do is to see things in the light of eternity.

[15 : 55] Take the long view. David writes, verse 10, A little while, and the wicked will be no more. Though you look for them, they will not be found.

But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity. Now this phrase, the meek will inherit the land, is a very important one to understand.

In fact, Jesus quotes it hundreds of years later. Originally, when David wrote that, the meek will inherit the land, it referred to the promised land of Canaan, which God promised to the Israelites.

But at this stage, when David writes, it's still this land that God has promised his people is still inhabited by wicked nations, by powerful people who also get along by doing wrong.

And God's people, the Israelites, were weak by comparison. They had little military strength. But what they did have, what they did have was a relationship with the creator of the universe. And they had his laws, his instructions, his blueprint for a society that lives according to the created order of God.

[17 : 06] And David says, by following those laws, by obeying that blueprint in God's law, by pursuing holiness and righteousness and pleasing God rather than resorting to the ways of the nations around them, that is how they were going to inherit the land.

This was very key. This is why the psalm was so important for these Israelites to read, that they're not going to inherit the land by resorting to the ways of the world, but they're going to inherit the land by submitting to the ways of God.

God's way, not the world's way. And they needed to hear that over and over again. That's why you also see that's a repeated phrase in the psalm. The meek will inherit the land. The meek will inherit the land. And that's exactly what happened for a little while.

In the history of Israel, under the rule of David and Solomon, the kings, they prospered. They inherited the land more than they could have ever expected. The land was blessed.

But sadly, that only lasted a little while. It wasn't long before even the Israelites were tempted, eventually, to join the world and its ways. And as they did that, the Old Testament is the history of this repeated pattern of them being tempted by the world's ways, joining the world's ways and losing the land, losing the promise, losing their blessing, and eventually going into exile.

[18 : 29] Even God's people fail to follow God's ways and keep their blessing, keep their promised land. And you know, the history of Israel is not just in the Bible as a story to tell our kids.

The history of Israel is there to show us ourselves. It's a mirror. We look at that history, we look at those people, and what we see is, we see ourselves.

We see our own tendencies, don't we? We see our own failure to be the people that God calls us to be, and to obey God's laws, and to not be influenced by the world around us.

Think of your own work situation. Can you tell me that you've always maintained an upright, godly attitude? Probably not. When we read these psalms about the wicked and the righteous, and there's a lot of them, we read these psalms, and we see that it talks about the wicked and it talks about the righteous, and there's no middle ground.

It's one or the other. And we read them, and you know what? They make us uncomfortable, don't they? We read all these great blessings that the righteous have, the righteous, and we read of all these curses that fall upon the wicked, and we realize that if we're honest, we can't really put ourselves in the category of the righteous, can we?

[19 : 49] These psalms, like, we can't read them very comfortably, because we've already broken God's law. Have a look. Have a look at God's law. The Ten Commandments, for example, they are just examples of all the kind of things we get wrong, all the ways that we don't live according to God's blueprint, which means that we shouldn't be so quick to call down judgment on the wicked, because we too will have to face God's justice for our own sins and our own wickedness.

When it comes to evil, you see, we're all in the same boat at the end of the day. Maybe according to society standards, you might be able to think that you're good enough, but according to God's law, God's holy law, his blueprint for a life that pleases him, we've all fallen short.

We've all failed. We're all in the category of the wicked. But you see, that's exactly why Jesus came. And that's why whenever you come to St. Mark's Church, you will hear about Jesus.

That's why we make such a big deal of him. Because, you know, I said earlier the consequences of breaking God's laws are inevitable. You can't escape them. They're as inevitable as breaking the laws of gravity, which should sober us all up a bit, because we know in the back of our mind we've all broken God's laws.

How often do we go through our days ignoring God's laws, thinking that they won't have any consequences if we break them? It should sober us.

[21 : 20] And by the way, with Jesus coming, nothing changes. It's not like all of a sudden God's laws no longer apply to us. That's why we keep those laws up on the wall there, because they still apply.

They have not changed, and they will not change. God's laws will remain in this universe as long as light and darkness remain, as long as gravity remains, as long as all of his other laws remain.

Jesus doesn't do away with God's law. And there are consequences every time we break those laws, every time we break God's law, every time we think thoughts which are not honoring to God, every time we chase after idols and love them more than God, every time we think harm upon our neighbor, every time we fail to love our neighbor and fail to love God, there are consequences.

Every single time you've transgressed God's holy law, there are consequences. But then again, this is why we make such a big deal of Jesus, because what Jesus came to do is not to cancel God's law, but he came to fulfill God's law.

And here's the thing, knowing that we don't fulfill God's law, he came to fulfill God's law for us, on our behalf, living the perfect life that we couldn't live.

[22 : 44] And then he didn't only do that, but he went on to die to take the consequences of us breaking those laws. To take all of those consequences, which all of those inevitable consequences for you breaking God's law, Jesus took on the cross, so that all of those who believe in him have their sins taken off their account and put onto his, and have his righteousness, his holy living, his perfect obedience of God's law taken from his account and put onto ours.

We trust in him. That is why we make such a big deal of Jesus here. I mean, isn't that the most incredible news that you've ever heard? That all of your failure to obey God's laws, all of the times you've broken God's laws, which have inevitable and terrible consequences, Jesus came to take those consequences on himself.

That is the best news you will ever hear. He did that so that you can be the righteous person in the Psalms. He is ultimately the righteous person that the Psalms are speaking about, when it speaks about righteous people inheriting the land, etc., etc.

But all who are in him through faith inherit his righteousness, so that you can be, through Jesus, the righteous person that the Psalm talks about, rather than the wicked person.

I mean, which do you want to be? If you look at the ultimate fates of either, and you could choose, do you want to be the wicked person in the Psalm, or do you want to be the righteous person in the Psalm?

[24 : 25] Well, I mean, it's a no-brainer, isn't it? Jesus and Jesus alone came to bring you into righteousness, to make you that righteous person. And you know what?

That's why, in the Beatitudes, in his Sermon on the Mount that Adrian read earlier, that's why Jesus quoted this very Psalm. Did you spot it? In his famous sermon, he says, Matthew 5, 5, Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

It's almost like a passing phrase, but it's got so much significance when we read it in light of Psalm 37. And the meek, by the way, he talks about, what it means to be meek is to be humble enough to confess our sins to God and submit our lives to Jesus as our King.

That is what it means to be meek in this context. The meek, Jesus says, are the ones who will one day inherit not just the land.

He changes the Psalm a bit. Did you notice that as well? David says the meek will inherit the land, the promised land of Canaan. Jesus says, no, no, no, the meek will inherit the earth, the whole earth.

[25 : 45] God will give the meek, those who come and submit themselves to God through Jesus Christ, God will give them the high places in the world to come that they did not seek for themselves in this world.

And that is the long view that Christians are called to take today, which will change the way we look at this world when we take the long view. And it will help us to avoid the temptation to compromise.

The view that even though wicked people seem to be running things now, even though wicked, ungodly people seem to be running the show, and wicked ways seem to prosper, and people get along by doing wrong, one day God will come to judge, the Bible says, God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice.

And he will come to judge all of that wickedness, and all of it will come to an end, and wicked people will be cut off once and for all, and God's people, those who humbled themselves before Jesus, the meek, will take over this world.

All that the wicked people once ruled, we will rule through Jesus. Question is, are you going to be there? Are you going to be one of those people?

[27 : 06] Are you one of the meek who have humbled themselves before God in trusting and serving Jesus as your king? Well, if not, if you're not the meek that Jesus speaks about, don't waste any time.

Stop clinging to your pride and your power and your desire for the things of the world. Come to Jesus, realize that he is your king, and sooner or later, one way or another, you will submit to him.

Do it rather sooner than later, because he is the only one who can pay for your sins against God. And that is why you need to come to him. You need to submit to him.

You need to humble yourself before Jesus. And if you haven't done that yet, please speak to me. If you're too intimidated to speak to the pastor, speak to the Christian friend who brought you here today.

I'm not that scary, by the way. And I'd love to help you to realize what it means to submit your life to Jesus and really enter that new, abundant, amazing life with him as your king, where the promises of, where is it?

[28 : 16] Psalm 37, verse, this is just amazing, sorry, verse 4, this promise will come true for you if you submit your life to Jesus.

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires. Isn't that a great promise? Of course, your heart's desires will change when you submit to Jesus to right desires, to good, wholesome, beautiful desires, which will, which you will achieve, which God will give you when you take delight in him first and foremost.

And so you're going to be one of those people, the meek. And if you have done that, if you have humbled yourself to Jesus, then that should cause you to do at least three things.

And I'm going to close now, you'll be pleased to know, but I want to leave you with three instructions to take into your work and your week ahead. Knowing these things that we've learned, if you're a Christian, should cause you to do this.

First of all, don't fret. Don't fret. Just chill. Just calm down. Verse 1, do not fret because of those who are evil.

[29 : 33] Verse 7, do not fret when people succeed in their ways. Verse 8, do not fret. It leads only to evil. If you trust in Jesus, then you don't have to fret. You don't have to get upset when you see wicked people getting ahead, when you see corrupt politicians dragging our country through the dirt, when you see wicked people in business get ahead through underhanded means.

You don't have to fret because that won't last. It is temporary. And all that they are trying to achieve through their wicked means will one day be inherited by God's people anyway.

So why worry? Verse 12, 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.

See, God is still in control and he's not stressing. So neither should we. Secondly, do good. Verse 3, trust in the Lord and do good.

Dwell in the land and enjoy safe past or take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Don't be tempted to get ahead the way others do. Rather, seek to do what is right over and above doing what is expedient.

[30 : 51] You know what I mean by that? Seek to do what is right even if it's not the most efficient way to do things. Even if that's not what you're expected to do. Even if you're pressured to do the other thing, seek to do what is right even if it will hurt you and not get you that sale or whatever.

Seek to do what God wants first because his laws have not gone away. He still desires a certain pattern of life from his people and when, okay, doesn't mean you'll be perfect in this life.

You will mess up and if you've trusted in Jesus, all of those mess-ups go on him on the cross. But that doesn't mean we let go. It means even more so that we seek to fulfill God's laws because besides that, you don't really need the world's recognition anyway.

So you'll seek to do God's laws and you'll be ostracized for that and you'll be looked down upon for that. But you don't need the world's recognition. Who cares? And you don't need what the world calls success.

You don't really need that extra sale that you might lose by being honest. Rather, learn to delight in God and he will one day give you more than you could ever hope for. And then finally, the final thing I want you to take away this week is be still and wait.

[32 : 16] Verse 7, be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. Verse 34, hope in the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land. When the wicked are destroyed, you will see it.

Now while a Christian knows these things to be true, while we have a hope that carries us through the trials and temptations of this world, we must still wait for it and that's the hard part, isn't it?

We must wait because this is the age of salvation. This is the age that is before God comes to judge sin, that sinners still have a chance to come to Jesus by believing the gospel.

It'll be too late once he comes and so there's a reason we're waiting. It's a good reason that God hasn't brought that day yet and so we need to be patient in this age and not just sitting on our backsides but getting involved in doing the only thing that is worth doing which is spreading the gospel of Jesus while we wait.

But now notice as well all of these instructions that are repeated in the psalm to not fret, to do good and to be patient. I wonder if you've found something familiar in them.

[33 : 33] If you've come across the fruit of the spirit in Galatians, these are all parts of the fruit of the spirit. Peace, do not fret, patience and goodness are all the fruit of the spirit.

They're things that we can do only when we have God's spirit in control of our daily lives. It's only then when we actually let God's spirit into our workplaces, into our daily lives by feeding on his word and by praying constantly and by being aware of his presence and his promptings not just in our quiet times at home or when we come to church on Sunday but every hour of every day at work giving God space at your office, at the factory, in the car, whatever, wherever you work, wherever you're going this week, is God going to go with you?

I mean God of course is always present but have you allowed his spirit to fill you each day? Because that and that alone is the way that you will stay patient and peaceful and avoid temptation to do wrong in a stressful and wicked world this week.

Will you do that? Let me pray for God to help us. Yes Father, thank you for this reminder in your word of your ultimate justice and goodness and control of this world even when things seem to be going out of control.

And Lord, we know that you sent Jesus to make us righteous and to give us a sure hope of inheriting the earth and eternal world with no death or suffering or pain or parting.

[35 : 17] Lord, what a great hope that is. We thank you for Jesus. Thank you for that hope. But we do ask Lord that you would help us as we look at this world, as we work in this world, as we look at the news.

Help us not to fret. Help us to be patient and help us despite the wickedness in this world to do good, to seek, to please you each day so that the world might look on and see us and be attracted to you through us and through our behavior.

Lord, help us to be witnesses for the gospel, that great gospel of salvation. Even this week, give us opportunities to share with those around us why we're not fretting, why we're being patient, why we can be at peace in a world that has so little peace.

So we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.