

Why Do The Ungodly Often Fare So Well And The Godly So Badly?

Text: Psalm 37: 25-40

1) Trust in God's Goodness

Suggested Hymns:

2) The end of the Godly and the wicked

408, 416, 397, 347, 402

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 37:25-40, ²⁵ *I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.* ²⁶ *He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed.*

²⁷ *Depart from evil, and do good; And dwell forevermore.* ²⁸ *For the LORD loves justice, And does not forsake His saints; They are preserved forever, But the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.* ²⁹ *The righteous shall inherit the land, And dwell in it forever.*

³⁰ *The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, And his tongue talks of justice.* ³¹ *The law of his God is in his heart; None of his steps shall slide.*

³² *The wicked watches the righteous, And seeks to slay him.* ³³ *The LORD will not leave him in his hand, Nor condemn him when he is judged.*

³⁴ *Wait on the LORD, And keep His way, And He shall exalt you to inherit the land; When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.* ³⁵ *I have seen the wicked in great power, And spreading himself like a native green tree.* ³⁶ *Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found.*

³⁷ *Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; For the future of that man is peace.* ³⁸ *But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; The future of the wicked shall be cut off.*

³⁹ *But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble.* ⁴⁰ *And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, And save them, Because they trust in Him.*

(NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A problem that has puzzled the children of God from earliest times is, *Why do the ungodly often fare so well and the godly so badly?* We see the worldly, even the scoffers, often rich and honoured, perhaps enjoying the luxuries of life, while those who confess Christ are scoffed at and are often in poverty and sickness.

Some people complain, *We cannot see why God should visit us with sickness, etc.* We have always been faithful members of the Church and have made many sacrifices for Christ's cause. Satan may even whisper to them, as he did to Job through his wife, *Curse God and die!*¹

These are very natural or "human" thoughts. If a friend favours us, we favour him. And our near relatives — do we not love them above others and show this love and affection in every way possible? Should not God do the same for us, His children? But now He seems to forget all we have ever done for Him and His cause!

Today's Psalm considers this problem and solves it for us. We see the life of the godly and of the ungodly compared, and the ultimate end of both. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Trust In God's Goodness

Our text begins, ²⁵ *I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.* ²⁶ *He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed.*

The psalmist here makes the point that, generally speaking, it is not true that the righteous fare worse in this life and are unhappier than the wicked. Quite the contrary, we read in 1 Timothy 4:8, *bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*

In the land of Israel the Mosaic provisions made begging very exceptional, at least at the time of David. Yet David does not tell us that the righteous are never tried. They do have trials but they are never forsaken.

David himself was in dire straits when he asked for bread from Abimelech.² At another time he sent men to Nabal to ask for help.³ When he was hounded by Saul, he was in extreme danger of his life and no doubt often in desperate need of the necessities of life. But he was never forsaken.

Furthermore, the righteous are not continually in extreme want. The patriarchs, Job, the God-fearing Jewish kings, and others in Holy Scripture were men of means.

Besides this, Christians are happier because they have learned to appreciate the blessings they have. We read in *Luther's Small Catechism* that "*God gives daily bread ... also to all the wicked, but ... He would lead us to know it and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.*"⁴ We have probably heard of children of wealthy parents surrounded by expensive playthings, but disgruntled. How often you meet with the rich who are dissatisfied because they are not richer!

But the person who can appreciate the beauties of nature, who can rise with the poet above the common-place, who is thrilled by the symphonies of masterly music, who can discern the intricate harmony and diversity of colour and formation in flowers and plants, who can admire the beautiful plumage of birds and the melody of their song, who is truly appreciative of health and ability to serve God and his fellow-beings, who can join in the hymns of our Church and is uplifted by them, and especially by the Gospel of Christ is certainly not poor.

The millionaire Carnegie, when addressing a group of young men, once said: "*The greatest handicap a young man can have in making a success of life is to possess almost unlimited riches.*"

On the other hand, poverty has been praised by hermits and philosophers as the path to holiness and is the mother of all virtues. However, Solomon prayed in Proverbs 30:8-9, ***Give me neither poverty nor riches -- Feed me with the food allotted to me; ⁹ Lest I be full and deny You, And say, "Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.***

Truly, a person may live in a simple dwelling, be destitute of all comforts and social privileges, and still be content and happy. But pinching poverty usually implies that a person is undernourished, underclothed, and haunted by the fear of want. It may mean polluted air, unwholesome food, discomforts, and may lead to evils and crime, disease and death.

Even a Christian may find himself in circumstances of extreme poverty; but the Holy Spirit will use that very cross to bring him nearer to God. The hymnist writes, *Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee, E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me.*⁵

What position did Christ take? He was neither a capitalist nor a Socialist nor a Communist. He had nowhere to lay His head;⁶ yet He was not a beggar, nor did He make the appearance of one. His disciples, while with Him, never were in want, as we read in Luke 22:35, ³⁵ *And [Jesus] said to them, "When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" So they said, "Nothing."*

Verse 26 of our text says that ²⁶ *he is ever merciful, and lends.* It might appear that the righteous would lack because they are *"ever merciful, and lend."* But he lends to the Lord — the safest investment. God's bank has never been known to fail. Like the bounteous Giver of all good gifts His children also delight in doing good. How true are the words: *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"!*

All has not been said. The seed of the righteous is blessed, *And his descendants are blessed.* Such parents leave a rich heritage to their children as, even if they have no earthly goods to divide, they leave them their blessing, that of a godly example and training.

When Christ was about to part with His disciples, He could not even leave them as much as His garments, but He said in John 14:27, ²⁷ *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."*

Our text continues,²⁸ *For the LORD loves justice, And does not forsake His saints; They are preserved forever, But the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.* By way of contrast, while the saints are never forsaken, but preserved forever, the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.

Recall the Conclusion of the Ten Commandments. *"I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments."*

Consider the fate of the house of Saul, Jeroboam, and Ahab. Even the world often quotes the saying that honour and wealth ill gotten seldom reaches the third generation. Be that as it may; the legacies of the wicked never include the peace which Christ speaks of.

³⁰ *The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, And his tongue talks of justice.* How can you recognise the righteous? He speaks wisdom. A person's tongue is an index to his character. The mouth portrays the heart. *"Righteousness is wisdom in action."* He talks of justice. He always favours strict obedience to the laws and the impartial execution of them. He holds that God's judgments will come to pass, just as surely as God's promises have come in the past as we have seen in the Flood, and will see in the Final Judgment.

We read in Matthew 24:37-39, ³⁷ *"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.* ³⁸ *"For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,* ³⁹ *"and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

Verse 31 states, ³¹ *The law of his God is in his heart; None of his steps shall slide.* Furthermore there is no hypocrisy in the righteous, for the Law of God is in his heart. What he says he really means. His faith in God and the absence of guile secure an even tenor for life. The Law of God is in his heart and is to him the pilot in days of adversity as well as in days of prosperity.

Verses 32 ³² *The wicked watches the righteous, And seeks to slay him.* On the other hand we find that the wicked watch the righteous and seeks to kill him.

The Jewish leaders "watched" that Righteous One daily, trying to trip Jesus and to kill Him. The latter they were permitted to do. But Jehovah did not leave Him in their hands, but vindicated His innocence by raising Him from the dead.

The same holds with all true followers of Christ. By human thinking Christ was left in the hands of the wicked, for He suffered torments and a cruel death. There have been many martyrs in the history of the Church from Abel down.

But Jehovah will not condemn the righteous when he is judged, ³³ *The LORD will not leave him in his hand, Nor condemn him when he is judged.* God allows temporary injustices for the wise purposes of training His children.

However, on that Great Day the lying spirits shall be unmasked, and the truth shall be revealed. For the just shall then see how the wicked are cut off.

It is true that it may not appear so in this life. As our question seemingly puts it, *Why do the ungodly often fare so well and the godly so badly?* The wicked is seen in great power, spreading himself like a *native green tree*. He at times seems a veritable Caesar in power and a very rich person in wealth. He spreads himself like an enormous green tree, adding house to house and field to field.

Thus we often see the wicked being rich, proud, and reckless in their prosperity, while the children of God may be tossed about by storms of persecution and affliction.

Yes, the Lord does at times permit the wicked to wallow in worldly wealth, but it is for their destruction. Take the case of the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas. The Lord allowed them to prosper in their wickedness, *“because He desired to kill them.”*⁷ What an example of warning!

But after all, this green tree is a thing of the earth; its roots are in the clay of earthly things; its honours are as transitory as are its fading leaves. For a time its shadow is cast over the lesser trees, but the woodman’s axe will cut it down. When you pass there again, the wood has been carried away, and the very roots torn from the ground.

Verse 36, ³⁶ *Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found.* The names and memory of the ungodly are soon lost and forgotten. How often we hear or read of ‘riches’ collapsing! Perhaps he has taken his life, perhaps he had trouble with the law, at any rate he has flown like a bird of ill omen. His name was in everybody’s mouth yesterday, but today is gone, as our text says; *Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found.*

2. The End Of The Godly And The Wicked

This thought introduces the second and more important part of our text, in which we are told to look to the end of both the godly and the ungodly if we wish properly to evaluate their whole life.

Verse 37, ³⁷ ***Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; For the future of that man is peace.*** We are told to mark and observe, the perfect man for an example. Christ is the perfect model. We read in 1 Peter 1:15, ¹⁵ ***but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.***

However, we should also remember those who have spoken to us the Word of God, follow their faith and note their end. We read in Hebrews 13:7, ⁷ ***Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.***

We should to the glory of God recount the services they have rendered and emulate their example, “follow their faith.” Indeed, as God gives us grace, we should strive to be an example to others, because actions speak louder than words. We read in 1 Timothy 4:12, ¹² ***Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*** And in Philippians 3:17, ¹⁷ ***Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.***

And also 1 Peter 2:12, ¹² ***have your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.***

It is the perfect man we should imitate. Only God is absolutely perfect. But the child of God is also considered perfect in God’s sight through Christ’s perfect work of atonement.

True, the Christian also notices daily imperfections. He confesses, “*We daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment.*” Therefore the Christian daily prays, “*Forgive us our trespasses.*” And he knows from Scripture that God daily and fully forgives him and considers him “a perfect man” in Christ Jesus. St. Paul tells us in Colossians 2:10 that ***you are complete in Him.***

That “perfect man,” in setting out, may have encountered many obstacles, may have suffered many tribulations while on the way; but the end of that man is peace.

A peace of mind, as opposed to doubting. A peace of security, having reached the goal. A peace of conscience, assured of the forgiveness of sins. A

peace in death, falling asleep in Jesus, resting from all labours and tribulations. A peace which the world cannot give.

But if we want to die in Christ, we must live in Christ. We cannot die like believing Lazarus if we live like the unbelieving rich man who shows no act of kindness to others.

Verse 38 of our text says ³⁸ ***But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; The future of the wicked shall be cut off.*** The time of grace will be shortened. *“They live too fast.”* Sins shorten their life. The end of the wicked is dismal, while that of the righteous is bright.

Why, then, envy the godless, even though for a time they have the acclaim of the crowd? Rather strive to be lastingly happy, taking as your guiding principle to fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

³⁹ ***... the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble.*** The key to the whole situation is that the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord. The righteous lives the life he does and dies the death of peace and inherits life eternal — all of the Lord.

This free grace is the very marrow of the Gospel. He is our ***“strength in the time of trouble.”*** Next Sunday we will sing, *“A mighty fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon.”*

Our text ends in the triumphant note of victory. ⁴⁰ ***And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, And save them, Because they trust in Him.*** Let us trust in Jesus Christ, He will help us and deliver us and save us. *“This is most certainly true.”* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Job 2:9

² 1 Samuel 21:1-6

³ 1 Samuel 25:10

⁴ *Luther's Small Catechism*, 4th Petition, p159

⁵ Hymn 872

⁶ Luke 9:58

⁷ 1 Samuel 2:25