

## ONE DAY

... when wrongs get corrected

Psalm 37

WEFC March 28, 2010 Palm Sunday

Few people would argue that people like Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, and a host of others should get their day in court and be sentenced for the absolutely horrendous things they have done.

We have built into us a sense of right and wrong; a sense of justice.

People, who openly and arrogantly do evil need to be stopped.

The atmosphere was charged as He rode into town on a donkey. Palm branches and articles of clothing paved the way for His successful entry into the capital city.

Riding on a wave of political or national popularity, Jesus, in unmistakable symbolism, by the way He came, was declaring Himself to be the winner.

The crowd loved it.

Their hopes were high.

Finally, wrongs would be corrected. Today was the first day where now life would be different. Finally, God had heard their frustration and had come to do something about it.

The celebration in a few short days turned into being a bust. Euphoria turned into anger; hope into distrust; life into death.

Palm Sunday ... the day when God's marked Man would finally step out and do something impressive ... He would start by setting the world straight.

... but it didn't happen

... and it hasn't happened to this day.

... and our frustration continues.

We all read about those who ...

- cheat are never get caught
- lie and get away with it
- bully others around and no one lays a finger on them
- mock justice, laugh at it and no one says anything

... and it becomes a bit harder to believe that God is who His Word emphatically says He is.

Our conclusion is that God either cannot do anything about what is happening, or He is soft on wickedness, or we just don't get it.

Who cares about the celebrations where Jesus is exalted, and yet the next day nothing changes ... and in a few more days, Jesus is dead.

Step back in history, back to **Psalm 37**. The problem is older than are we. Others have struggled with it ... and it is there to deal with our cynicism.

*Key Thought:*

**Jesus came to “right” obvious and blatant “wrongs”, but He does it on His schedule rather than ours.**

Today, we ache for, long for, wish for someone to level the playing field, ... someone who will rip away all the rhetoric and do something so that wrong would be seen for what it is – wrong ... and let right and justice run the show.

Here is how one person, centuries before us, put it.

**37:1**

**Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong;**

**37:7**

**... do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.**

**1. Our sense of justice is offended if evil people are not brought to justice ... now**

... and rightly so.

Wrong, evil, blatant injustice should be dealt with, the quicker the better.

... and when they get away with their obvious evil and persist in it, something inside of us begins to shout,

- The playing field is not level.
- This is not right

- If anyone can do something about this, it is God. God, what are you doing about it?

We want someone to ride into the city and say, “Enough of this ...” and start to clean things up.

We do not just want a Palm Sunday, we want everyday to be Palm Day – Jesus, the awesome Judge, catching up to people who have too long gotten away with everything.

Instead we read: **Do not fret because of evil men.**

Don't get upset; ... don't be overly concerned; ... don't let these things ferment in your mind.

Why should we not get upset?

**37:12-13**

**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.**

We are upset and God is laughing!?

... not at us, but at the wicked.

Here they are, thinking that they are getting ahead, running free, but they are not.

It's like the dog, running along that clothesline. He is free to run ... until the line runs out. We can stand back and watch as that line get's shorter and shorter. The dog is running after a squirrel or chasing a bird so intensely, that he has forgotten about the line.

We brace ourselves as we see the line running out ... and then we see the pooch's neck extended, feet lifted off the ground, and 2 and ½ somersault with a haft twist ... and then a confused dog as they realize that the line just came to an end.

With the wicked ... **God is content with certainty rather than urgency.**

Maybe it would be better that we do what God does ... laugh, rather than be enamored with what they are amassing in wealth and prestige.

The Lord laughs at the evil because

**37:13**  
... he knows their day is coming.

**37:2**  
for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.

**37:9**  
For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.

**37:10**  
A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found.

**37:15**  
But their swords will pierce their own hearts, and their bows will be broken.

**37:17**  
... for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous.

**37:20**  
But the wicked will perish: The LORD's enemies will be like the beauty of the fields, they will vanish— vanish like smoke.

**37:28**  
... the offspring of the wicked will be cut off;

**37:34**  
... when the wicked are cut off, you will see it.

**37:38**  
But all sinners will be destroyed; the future of the wicked will be cut off.

Some 10 times we are told in no uncertain terms that the wicked will never make it against God; that they are finished; cut off; will be broken; will not be found.

**Time and time we are told what we have a hard time believing: Wicked people do not get away with doing their thing.**

They really don't.

There is a day of judgment.

**What to us seems like obvious oversight or unconcern, is being watch meticulously by God.**

A father in a hurry, taking his 8-year-old son to school, makes a turn at a red light where it isn't allowed.

"Uh oh, I just made an illegal turn!" the man says.

"That's okay, Dad," the son says. "The police car right behind us did the same thing."

We know it; we've read it ... it needs to shape how we respond to the unfairness, the injustice of the moment.

After Palm Sunday, in a few short days, Jesus was being tried in a court of injustice and then crucified.

Why? ... Why isn't God acting?

... He is, but as the Scriptwriter of history, He hasn't written a predictable story line.

Application:

Our frustration with God isn't a good thing.

Meeting our expectations is not God's top priority.

We want Palm Sunday to be everyday ... and right now it cannot be that way.

We prefer to have things clearly laid out. This is right; that is wrong. Do this and you pay; follow that and you will be rewarded.

"God" is still "God". He is free to do what He chooses to do within the limitations of His character. He is the God of surprises, the God of second-chances, the God who is more than fair.

But what He wants us to get is just because we have to wait a few extra minutes, or a number of long years, He hasn't changed.

The wicked will not win.

The wicked will not rule.

Why? ... because God was, is and always will be just. He works on a different clock than do we.

We work on a 24 hour clock that stops on the average somewhere around the 80 year mark. If at all possible, we would like to see things tidied up within at least that framework of time, if at all possible.

It doesn't always work out that way.

It isn't always Palm Sunday ... where Jesus comes riding in as the winner; the sheriff setting the world straight immediately.

Transition:

... and God is not merely saying, "Trust me".

He is telling us, "You know better. I will not let you down, never. Justice will get the upper hand."

"Now, go and live that way ... even though it isn't happening as blatantly as you would like it to be happening."

Rather than wasting your energy on trying to figure out why God does things in His odd, God-way; getting frustrated with Him ...; live as if God were running this world because He is.

But is that not unreasonable?

Will we not get hurt?

Don't we need to have the Palm Sunday mentality that we need to straighten out everything now?

Understand what this looks like:

What we are talking about is how do the righteous, hopefully us, respond when we are the target of the evil of the wicked, who ...

- deliberately aim to take advantage of and attack the righteous - 12
- are infuriated by the purity of the righteous - 12
- deliberately target the righteous to harm them - 12
- borrow but never pay back - 21

Two areas need to be investigated if we are going to get this right.

**1. What kind of a “life” can we expect from God during this time of unfair treatment?**

**2. What ought to be our response when we are definitely at a disadvantage?**

**1. What kind of a “life” can we expect from God during this time of “unfair” treatment?**

**... one that is characterized by confusing circumstances and unshakeable confidence**

This is what derails our thinking and confuses our minds. This is what we still quite cannot figure out as we walk on this earth.

Here we are ... followers of God. That is good.

What happens to us ... though ... as followers of a God of justice, truth and right ... doesn't mesh together. It clashes with what we would assume should be happening to us.

Here is what the righteous (not perfect, but sincere God-follower) person can expect.

**37:16-19**

**Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked; for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous.**

**The days of the blameless are known to the LORD, and their inheritance will endure for ever. In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.**

- We are not going to have all the toys in life or its wealth
- We will go through times of disaster
- We will endure famine

As God's followers we are going to have hard times, times that to us do not make sense ... that match or correlate with God blessing us at all stages.

**37:23-24**

**If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand.**

- We may stumble, but we will not need to crash.

Life will not be perfect, but it will be “safe”.

### **37:39-40**

**The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in 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**

- We will face trouble, but not be defenseless against it.

- We will get harassed by people, but we will never be abandoned.

Everything will not be story-book perfect.

Let's put it into everyday language for ourselves.

As a God-follower ...

- we will experience diseases in our body ... being diagnosed with leukemia at 12 years of age, or cancer at 43, or experience migraines.

- we will further experience people deliberately going out of their way to make life miserable for us. They will be thrilled when we get hurt and happy if we lose at anything.

In other words – our following God does not excluded us from some of life's more bitter experiences.

God seemingly allows a smattering of everything out in the sea of humanity. We can't see any pattern or reason to what is happening.

So, in reality, whether we are God-followers or not, on both sides, some have it all good, most have a mixture, and a few have it all bad.

Though the circumstances may be confusing and all over the map ... the God-follower does have an advantage.

This comes in the form of an unshakable confidence – that God is hanging in there with us through it all ... pulling for us.

He ...

- upholds us
- is fully informed on what we are facing
- is committed to not letting us cave in under the hard times
- gives us stability in the middle of uncertainty
- provides a place to recharge
- steps in when we have our back against a wall

Author and pastor Jim Van Yperen tells this story:

Margaret attended a church I served many years ago. Confined to a wheelchair for most of her adult life, Margaret lived with a body both contorted and misshapen, ravaged by multiple sclerosis. She spoke softly, often slurring her words in barely audible grunts. She drooled constantly and was in pain nearly all her waking hours. Margaret had grounds for complaint; but she did not complain.

She loved Jesus, and she never missed church. Sunday morning and evening, midweek prayer meeting, and special gatherings, Margaret was always there, always in a neatly pressed dress.

One night, after I first arrived at the church, I was conducting a forum asking questions and facilitating dialogue with a group of about 20 people. I asked people to tell me their favorite Bible verse or a passage from Scripture that was personally meaningful.

Several people offered verses that I noted on a flip chart up front. After many people spoke, Margaret let me know she wanted to say something. Most of the people had recited their verses from memory or read them aloud from Scripture. Since Margaret could not speak, I looked up the verse for the group and read it for her:

"It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes" (Psalm 119:71 NASB).

Margaret smiled broadly and nodded her head. Her wheelchair was a testimony to grace.

*Jim Van Yperen, "Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict" (Jim Van Yperen, 2002), pp. 106-107; submitted by Michael*

### **Confusing circumstances need an unshakeable confidence.**

... and God tells us that He will be that for us in those times when we live with a question mark on our face.

## **2. What ought to be our response when we are definitely at a disadvantage?**

### **In an unfair environment we intentionally live contrary to the current mood.**

Since life is not fair, since everything is not graded immediately and paid out instantly (good with blessing; bad with loss), the God-follower will need to balance a number of variables.

Do we take advantage of people and situations, or do we choose to go the high road and end up with less?

Do we collaborate with the dishonest and win, or do we stick with slow plodding truth and end up out of the race?

To live contrary to the current trends is never easy.

God encourages us to walk the less travelled road and this is how we need to walk it.

### **37:3, 27**

**Trust in the LORD and do good;**

**Turn from evil and do good**

### **Stay sweet in the midst of potentially bitter times – "... do good"**

Always bend in the direction of goodness ... even though the current is flowing in the other direction.

Though it will appear that you have choices, really, only one choice, that which is good, is open to the God-follower.

Evil is not a valid option.

Besides DOING GOOD, the God-follower is to known to speak with intelligence.

**37:30**

**The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just.**

**Our speech ...not a complaint, but constructive**

These appear to be the only direct statements as to one's behavior.

We will always hedge on "doing good" and "uttering wisdom" if we are not convinced that that is a very real way of living in an unfair environment.

That is probably why we find what we do in the lyrics of this song ... a heavy, heavy emphasis on getting us to think correctly on our connection with God.

***Here is where the struggle is lost or won.***

**37:3**

**Trust in the LORD**

Permit us to use this well-known phrase and fill out its definition by what we find in the remainder of this chapter.

We talk much about "trusting God".

Here is what TRUST looks like:

**37:4**

**Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

Trust is ...

- **being content and satisfied with God.**

There is no one better who could step into our lives.

**37:5**

**Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:**

Trust is ...

- **placing ourselves into God's hands and not jumping out in moments of perplexity.**

**37:7 (also v. 34)**

**Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;**

Trust is ...

- **realizing that while there are limits to explanation, presence alone may best explain what we most urgently need to know.**

Most likely, this is the hardest thing to learn.

***We want reasons; God desires presence.***

When reasons are not given or held back as classified information, the best explanation comes in another form.

To be in God's presence ... to quit bombarding Him with requests or questions ... as if we think we are going to convince Him to accomplish what we think best because of our logic ...

To be silent before God, but present with Him ... and not leave because there is silence.

A number of weeks ago we asked you to stay behind and pray for 120 seconds ... two minutes.

It was brought up at staff meeting that the time was longer than two minutes ... When another person said that they were looking at their watch and that it was 120 seconds ... but it was 120 seconds of silence.

Here may be the most difficult, but also the best part of "trust" ... patiently and quietly waiting ... permitting God to reconfigure our mind that is racing as we attempt to survive.

When my daughter Amy was three years old, we had her in a preschool. They were going to give the parents of the preschoolers a Christmas concert, so we filled a tight-capacity room. Every parent was there, equipped with a camera and the biggest flash it could bear. About 30 kids came out and filled up the risers, all tucked together. One willing-hearted teacher up front led them in "Joy to the World." She had a nylon string guitar that probably hadn't been played since the Christmas program the year before, and that was probably the last time it was tuned as well. Nevertheless, she had a willing heart.

The kids were only three years old. They could barely speak in complete sentences, let alone sing full measures of music. Undaunted, the teacher began her solo—"Joy to the world!"—but the kids were more interested in locating their parents: "Hi,

Daddy! Hi, Mom!" The teacher kept singing, "Joy to the world!" Then Amy saw me. I took a picture of her. The teacher kept singing, "Joy to the world!" Just then one of the boys in the back of the risers began to fall backwards. He bravely took four others with him. Bang! She kept singing, "Joy to the world!"

It was absolute chaos: formless and void. When the song was done, I was the first to jump to my feet like popping corn. The parents gave the kids a standing ovation. We took pictures. It was like Halley's comet had just come through the room. We were all so proud.

After it was done, I went outside to get some air, and I was chuckling to myself. I thought, *We just gave a standing ovation to the worst concert we've ever heard. I just took pictures of the worst concert I've ever heard.* Then I thought, *But wasn't Amy good? She's cool.*

Why in the world did I applaud? It wasn't because of their performance. It was because that was my little girl up there. I applauded them based not on performance but on relationship.

When I was thinking about that, it was as if the Lord again reminded me: Wayne, that's why I applaud you. It has nothing to do with your performance. It has everything to do with the fact that you have a relationship with me and you're my kid.

My heart began to melt and tears came to my eyes, because I began to understand that what pleases God the most is the relationship we have with him.

*Wayne Cordeiro, "A Personal Relationship," Preaching Today audio #225*

**37:9**

**... those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.**

Trust is ...

- **developing a long range desire for God**

**37:17**  
the LORD upholds the righteous.

Trust is ...

- **being convinced that we can do what is right (even though we are short-changed by people) and it is not a useless exercise**

**37:18**  
The days of the blameless are known to the LORD, and their inheritance will endure for ever.

Trust is ...

- **accepting that God truly does know what is happening to us**

**37:28**  
For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. They will be protected for ever,

Trust is ...

- **accepting God's concern when the evidence would indicate otherwise.**

When bad things happen to us, it is not a reflection that His love is being reduced or removed, but that He has entrusted to us a special assignment.

***What happens to us now is not a indication of the degree to which God loves me.***

We think a bit more deeper than on the surface, realizing that hard times do not necessary equal God's disapproval.

**37:31**  
The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip.

Trust is ...

- **when the heart is just as impressed as the mind**

On the outside, things are pretty much the same as it is for everyone else. Life is filled with the unexpected, the painful, the surprises, the norm.

But inside, the difference is like night and day.

The things that stimulate us are the same, but the responses are very different.

The reason for the difference – in one word – God.

God so reshapes our understanding of how life works ...

God makes us so un-defensive in a world that is cheating at every opportunity and tells us to be honest ...

God gets us to see things beyond the simplistic level ...

God becomes so real that we “trust” Him ...that even when the tide of society is sweeping everyone out, our heart does not panic, beat wildly, but waits on God.

The massive earthquake that rocked the nation of Haiti in January of 2010 brought with it an unfathomable amount of devastation, pain, and death. But as is often the case in times of extreme trial, there were also remarkable stories of bravery and heroism unearthed from the rubble in the days that followed.

Dan Woolley is one of those stories.

A film producer, Woolley was in Haiti working on a documentary about the country's starving children when the earthquake struck. He was inside the Hotel Montana when the shaking started, and the building collapsed before he could reach the street. When it was over, he found himself in the hotel basement among tons of fallen debris. Woolley was trapped with only the clothes on his back and an iPhone in his pocket.

Fortunately, though, his iPhone had a medical application that came in pretty handy. Using the light from the phone and the instructions from the app, Woolley was able to correctly diagnose a broken foot and use strips of clothing to bandage severe gashes he had suffered on his legs and the back of his head. Then he used the camera feature on the phone to get a map of his surroundings and plan a route to an elevator shaft that was protected from falling debris. More than 65 hours after the earthquake, Woolley was rescued by emergency personnel.

But it wasn't Woolley's quick thinking or handy gadgets that make his story remarkable. He earns that distinction because of the decisions he made on behalf of his wife and children during those 65 hours.

Dan Woolley is a Christian, and he told reporters after his rescue that he genuinely thought he was going to die in the hotel basement. So he wrote a note to his wife and children reminding them to trust God even in the middle of horrible situations.

"I was in a big accident," the note said. "Don't be upset at God. He always provides for his children, even in hard times. I'm still praying that God will get me out .... He may not, but He will always take care of ya."

*Sam O'Neal, Geneva, Illinois; source: Todd Wright, "Earthquake Survivor Calls iPhone a Life Saver," [www.nbcmiami.com](http://www.nbcmiami.com) (1-19-2010).*

That is "trust".

Palm Sunday ...it was announcement day.

That day reminded us that there is coming a time when all wrongs will be righted when Jesus Christ does begin His rule and His reign.

Don't get tied up in knots. Don't get frustrated with God.

Justice is coming.

Palm Sunday was the not the end, but the beginning ... an indicator of what is yet to come.

Wait ... God has never yet been late.

He will right all wrongs.

*Key Thought:*

**Jesus came to "right" obvious and blatant "wrongs", but He does it on His schedule rather than ours.**