

# TRUST IN GOD

*(Psalm 37.3-7)*

Evil men never prosper goes the saying or in the old public information message- **Crime doesn't pay.**

However, Proverbs 17:20 tells us that **"One whose heart is corrupt does not prosper; one whose tongue is perverse falls into trouble"** Yet at the end of our small reading from psalm 37 this morning, the final verse says **"do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes"**.

There appears then to be an acknowledgement in this psalm that the wicked do indeed seem to prosper and flourish.

You may have heard of a Colombian drug baron called Pablo Escobar. At the peak of his power in the 70s and 80s, Pablo Escobar brought in an estimated \$420 million a week in revenue, easily making him one of the wealthiest drug lords in history. Escobar, known as the "king of cocaine," saw his wealth grow so immense that he stashed piles of cash in Colombian farming fields, dilapidated warehouses, and in the walls of cartel members' homes, "Pablo was earning so much that each year he would write off 10% of the money because the rats would eat it in storage or it would be damaged by water or lost," Escobar was named by Forbes magazine as one of the ten richest men on the planet in the 80s.

To the people of Colombia there was some rather compelling evidence that evil men do in fact appear to prosper! Locally and nationally we will know of those who appear to get away with it and never get found out, Teflon coated as we call them as nothing can stick to them and bring about their demise.

This talk is primarily about trusting God not attacking or hating the successful evil rich and I feel I must point out that we as affluent people of the West need to remember that the world economic system is weighted very much in our favour but in the rest of the less fortunate world (and even our own country) when a law abiding life offers little in the way of job/house opportunities then any alternative means of putting food on the table, keeping a roof over our head and raising a family would obviously become appealing and we should be therefore be very careful to judge others and what about those brought up in crime families or married to the mob. It must be very difficult or impossible to break out of that cycle.

This psalm was written towards the end of David's life around three thousand years ago (I think), as he reflected on the full and varying highs and lows he had experienced over his reign. We can easily think that materialism or the desire for things is a modern problem but the desire of objects in David's day was no less than today. For Bentleys and Jaguars think Chariots and Arabian stallions. For Gucci and Chanel think in terms of Purple cloth and Frankincense. The desire for "things" was not something we in the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> Century are alone in having to deal with.

So what is the psalm saying to us about this issue?

**Firstly, God** does not for one millisecond say that we will not be confronted, challenged or even inspired and tempted by those around us who seem to prosper, flourish and get what they want while openly rejecting his ways and laws.

Ecclesiastes (7:15) tells us in its indomitable style that **"In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness"**.

God as always is alongside us saying I know how life is and can seem to you my people who strive and desire to follow my ways.

So having made this observation what does the psalm then tell us to do?

It says next **Trust in the Lord and do good**. Leave things in God's hands (trust) and go on with your normal duties obediently before the Lord. Don't let the other person's sin lead you into sin. Don't be envious of what other people have through illegal and immoral means.

Do what God has given you to do in obedience to Him. Trusting in God is not a catchphrase or an optimistic idea it is a course of action, you hand over the whole problem to the Lord and watch him vindicate you in His time.

Following on from this the psalm says **dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture**.

If you watch enough gangster or crime programmes, a very clear pattern usually emerges in that the seemingly successful villains with there Jets, cars and girls (always blonde and young!) never seem to have any rest they are either on the run from the police or rivals out to catch or kill them, their really is *no rest for the wicked* as their chosen lifestyle requires constantly checking over their shoulder and employing a team of bodyguards 24/7.

When the Psalm talks about *safe pasture* I suggest it means dwelling and living (metaphorically) where life has no complications or immediate threat. Not physically in a big house in Long Newton or Ingleby Barwick! but by trying to hold down a steady lawful job, paying your taxes raising your family in Gods ways and being realistic but faithful and hopeful in your aspirations and dreams for yourself and loved ones, in a spiritual and moral way that doesn't involve breaking the law or turning a blind eye to certain things to get up the social ladder.

This allows you to sleep peacefully in your bed without having to keep one eye open. This is how we also *Take delight in the Lord* by obedience to his ways in which we are told by the psalm he will give us the desires of our heart. This doesn't mean that He will give us anything our selfish heart desire. If we are delighting our self in the Lord, then our desires will be in line with His desires. This is in the Matthew verse of this morning "Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." We also need to bear in mind it will be to Gods timetable and not ours.

This issue makes me think of the Aesop's Fable about the Town Mouse and Country Mouse and how after a short while visiting his cousin in the town, Country Mouse was very happy to return to his simple easy country life or as a 13<sup>th</sup> century commentator on the story put it, "I'd rather gnaw a bean than be gnawed by continual fear".

Returning to Signor Escobar you might be interested to know that he was killed by Colombian security forces age 44-year-old having spent the last 18/12s of his life on the run from the Colombian and American authorities. His wealth did not really lead to full and happy life we might say.

Paul tells us in Thessalonians (4:11) to *"make it your ambition to lead a quiet life to mind your own business (and to work with your hands)"*. While this command was primarily about not sponging off others it was also concerned with witnessing to the non Christian community about love and dependence on God and each other while presenting an attractive alternative way of living and working as opposed to the I'm alright Jack lets climb the greasy pole of life whatever the price. This is in no way saying ambition should be abandoned and that we should live a wallflower existence away from the world but is an opportunity and calling to be the true light and salt to the world around us.

In the last verse of the Psalm (7) we come across the word **Fret** again which actually occurs 3 times in the whole of the Psalm 37, we are commanded not to fret (37:1, 7, 8). The Hebrew word for Fret means to burn. The verb could be translated, "Don't work yourself into a slow burn" when you see evil men prospering. Don't let it get under your skin; it will only lead you into wrong (37:8). So one aspect of submission to God is to put off such irritation, giving God the sovereign right to deal with evildoers in His time and way and remembering Pauls' words from Romans "everyone shall give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

In summary then we need to give these things to God. As Jesus gives us instruction to do in Matthew (6:25-34). **"Seek Ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you"** and allow God to **provide** for us as he promises too and not to chase the false Gods and idols of the World that vie for our attention.

I want to finish by reading the Matthew verses we heard earlier but from The Message version of the Bible which you may or may not be familiar with, this was translated by a man called Eugene Peterson. His primary goal was to capture the tone of the text and the original conversational feel of the Greek, in contemporary English. He hoped to bring the New Testament to life for **two** different types of people. The first group were those who hadn't read the Bible because it seemed too distant, irrelevant, and antiquated. The second group were those who had read the Bible all their lives but now found it "old hat," and familiar that they were no longer startled by the truth of its message.

I think this section I am about to read really puts into modern day context the whole issue of how we should deal with any envy or anger to those who prosper through evil and also may have the things we would like too.

*"If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds.*

*"Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you*

*ever seen colour and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them.*

*"If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving.*

*People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.*

*"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.*