

“BE CALM IN AN UNJUST WORLD”

Text: Psalm 37:1-9

By Pastor YAU

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INTRODUCTION:

1) This happened in the world: After beheading 2 innocent Japanese captives in late January, the Islamic State murdered a Jordanian fighter jet pilot by burning him alive in a cage, and posted the brutal video on the internet so the whole world could see their barbaric acts of terror. En route back to Jordan after visiting the United States, Jordanian King Abdullah II ordered the execution of two ISIS prisoners and threatened to execute 4 more. While the world is on his side, rallying support for the king's decision, some questioned the wisdom of reacting to violence with violence and whether it is the best way to pursue a long-term strategy to counter terrorism. Those of us who are not in his shoes can say anything we want, but you have to be in his position to really understand why the king did what he did.

2) This written in the Word: While the Bible contains stories of vengeance against evil, it has lot more to say about positive steps to counter evil in this world. We all can understand the anger of those who were victims of violence and their ways of taking justice into their own hands, but we, as children of God, who believe God has better ways to handle injustice, may need to examine what is the best way to handle violence and injustice. In Psalm 37, King David gave us a different perspective on handling violence and vile people. Since we are children of God, we believe the best way for us to face violence is to act or react according to the teaching of God's word. Here is how:

THINGS WE SHOULD DO: These few verses in Psalm 37 list some of the best ways to face violence and injustice, and they are all words of action.

1) Trust in the Lord: “Trust in the Lord.” (37:3) This is the starting point and the foundation of all actions: The Lord has all things in our lives mapped out in his palm and he knows what is happening to us and he knows how to deal with them. We need to be careful when reacting to violence and injustice that we don’t believe we know better how to react. To react in anger and retaliation is human, but to trust in the Lord and his wisdom is truly a sign of God’s Spirit.

2) Trust...and do good: (37:3b) Unless you want to invoke the teaching of the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:20, do good to those who persecute you, most Bible scholars suggest that we shouldn't fight evil by doing evil, but continue to do what is good. Not allowing evil or injustice to change the course of our lives or our characters is the key. Paul said, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:21)

3) Dwell in the land: (37:3b) The land here refers to the Promised Land, the land the Lord God had given to his people, the land where God's eyes are watching, the land where God is the protector, the land where we can feel safe. Don't try to go anywhere else. Stay calm in times of violence. This is a very important assurance: Stay put, don't move, don't be scared, the Lord is with you here.

4) Feed on his faithfulness: (37:3c) The NIV says: “Enjoy safe pasture.” This is about the faithful providence of God in times of danger, violence, injustice and need. King David described God's provision and protection in Psalm 23:2, “He

makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters.” Because the Lord is our shepherd, we shall never be in want. (Psalm 23:1)

5) Delight in the Lord: (37:4) “Delight” isn't about being happy or joyful; it is about being content. Being happy and joyful is good, but being content is better. We often seek things to meet our heart's desire, believing that once we get them we will be happy or joyful. The fact is, any happiness or joy that comes from things won't last long, regardless of what they may be. Our true delight must be rooted in the Lord. When we can build our heart in the Lord, we are safe.

6) Commit your way to the Lord: (37:5) “Your way” means your path and future, things to come or to happen, the path you choose. All of us are anxious about our future, what to do, where to go, when life turns us upside down. To “commit” is to surrender, to trust or to give it to another person, as in a friendship or a marriage. We need to make a commitment to the Lord about the future of our life. This is more than an act of trust. It is also an act of love because we want to live our life to make the Lord happy. What percent of your life do you really commit to the Lord and what percent to yourself?

7) Be still before the Lord: (37:7) “Be still” means be calm, be quiet, and wait for the Lord to handle your situation. Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” There are only a few places where we read in the Bible that God cares that we know he is God. If we truly believe that he is the almighty God, why are we so anxious, agitated, angry, sad, worried or depleted in the face of terrible situations in life? I know it is much easier to say than do, but is there any other way that can do more or better to ease our anxious thoughts

and troubled hearts?

THINGS WE SHOULDN'T DO: Or at least try hard not to.

1) Do not get angry: “Do not get agitated by evil doers. Do not envy those who do wrong.” (37:1, Holman edition) This is the starting point of handling evil in our world: Don't get upset or angry. I confess that is very difficult for me, and I believe it's difficult for all of you too. But God has a purpose in advising us not to get angry in the face of evil, because when we react in anger, the result is always bad. We all know that to retaliate in anger is always a bad thing. No one can make the best decision when his head is blurred because of anger in his heart.

2) Do not envy evil: “Do not be agitated by one who prospers in his (evil) way, or by the man who carries out his evil plans.” (37:7) This is another trap we need to try hard to avoid: Never envy the prosperity of the wicked or want to do the same in your life. We need to believe firmly that evil never pays, and so never do what the evil ones do.

3) Do not repay evil with evil: “Refrain from anger and give up your rage; do not fret for it can only bring harm.” (37:8) Swift retaliation in anger won't achieve good results. It can only bring harm to your life in the future. If you have been harmed once by evildoers, why would you want to put yourself in a position to be harmed again by paying back evil with evil? Do not allow evil to destroy your spiritual character. The notion of “eye for eye and tooth for tooth” often has been misquoted by those who want to take justice into their own hands. In Exodus 21:22-25, any kind of payback must be rendered by a court, not by an individual,

particularly not by the angry victim of violence. James in his letter, 1:20, exhorted Christians not to resolve evil by anger, “For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

THESE GOD CAN AND WILL DO:

1) God will deal with evil his way: “For like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.” (37:2) After advising us not to get agitated by evil, God shows us his complete control of the world: Evil men won't last long because God will take them out very soon. This is true in all facets of life, be it personal or universal. No evildoers will prosper or live long.

2) God will replenish your loss: “Take delight in the Lord and he will give you your heart's desire.” (37:4) If you suffer loss because of evildoers, you don't have to fight to reclaim it. Remember what Job said when he lost almost everything in his life: “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will leave this life. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away.” (Job 1:21) All we have is from the Lord. He can give and he can take it away. Here in Psalm 37, God promises to give back to us all that we wish to have if we refrain from repaying evil with evil. See how God doubled his blessing to Job as he submitted to God's sovereignty. (Job 42:10-16)

3) God will bless you much more: “For evildoers will be destroyed, but those who put their hope in the Lord will inherit the land.” (37:9) Here we see that God doesn't just promise to destroy evildoers, he promises to reward those who are victims of evil. “Inherit” means given to for free. Inherit the land is the greatest promise of God to his people in

the Old Testament. Ownership of land meant security, permanence and prosperity. Even today, people still treasure ownership of land. Whatever you may lose to evildoers, God promises to pay you back much more than you deserve or can imagine.

BIBLICAL APPLICATIONS:

1) God is the final justice: “Do not take revenge, my friends ... for it is written: It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19) True justice comes from the Lord of righteousness. We all are sinners and we don't have the right to punish evil. God is just, and he promises to deal with evil his way in his time. If we trust God's love in rewarding good, we must also trust God's justice to punish evil. We often refer to the judges in the Supreme Court as justices, but they are not, and often are so unjust in many cases. No human being can be truly just, only God. God will exercise true and final justice to punish evil and evildoers in his way, at his time.

2) God rewards the just: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 5:10) What are we striving for in this life? What is the ultimate goal of our Christian living? Isn't it that we are striving to inherit the kingdom of God? If being persecuted for righteousness is the price we need to pay, so be it. Peter encouraged us this way: “It is better ... to suffer for