

“Great News for Those Who Worry”

Sermon for 10 August 2025

Texts: Psalm 73:17-28; Luke 16:19-31

There are bunches of things that put us in touch with the impossibility of executing the many simple demands of our Lord and King, Jesus. How about **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything give thanks and make your supplications known to God.** No can do. I cannot master either the *Do not fret* bit, the *gratitude* bit, or the *praying bit*. *I am just too insecure and the world is really scary.* My world is full of agitation and our schools are intent on graduating agitators! It’s as if we are born to protest! So, first, let’s admit the truth. At ground zero what is asked of us is impossible with man—that is, on the natural, human, fleshly and ordinary/worldly levels. But as our Lord coached us, **what is impossible with man is possible with God** but, and this is the absolutely critical piece, **you must be born again . . . born from above, heavenly regenerated, or made utterly new.** Something radically transforming has to happen in and through you—not just to you!—for you to meet Christ’s spiritual demands of you. You must, **by faith**, die to your old life, your self-life, your carnal, natural, ordinary and fleshly self and by the power of the resurrection, having crucified the flesh, along with all the accoutrements of sin. And just what are the accoutrements of sin? They are all the ways of sin, the habits, mental and spiritual, that we have picked up as sinners on this journey. That roadway, or spiritual path, has to be abandoned—for truly there are no short cuts, or easier roads. First we must come into contact with Christ the Terminator, to put it into our cultural terms; or the Crucified Crucifier, or our spiritual Undertaker—the one who buries us, takes us under, that we might die to sin and so rise again. We *participate* in this crucifixion, burial and resurrection matter; we do not merely follow, imitated, or seek to be like Jesus. Those goals, undertaken in our old self—as committed and unrepentant sinners/dust creatures/earthlings!—only defeat, frustrate and destroy us. Putting first things first: we must through faith and by divine grace be born again. And before your innate defiance, corruption, or rebellion—which is your sin nature, the one we are born with, at work!—can protest “there must be another path,” joyfully submit to the one at hand. *Say to the Lord of life, Slay me now that I may die to my accursed self and loathsome sin, then, that dead and buried, raise me up to new life as a new creature in Christ—full of your grace, love and power.* Then, Lord, *I shall fret not.* Then I will **love my enemies** as well as family and friends. I will live as one forgiven much and therefore free to forgive those who have harmed, betrayed, disappointed or even just let me down . . . repeatedly. I will freely do what you ask of me, because as a new creature in Christ I am free to do so. The serpentine nature in me can no longer impede my obedience even to **speaking the truth in love.**

Alluding to John 4, we should remind ourselves: **Except a man be born of water** (baptized in faith) **and the Spirit** (the Holy Spirit, not the spirit in man!) **he cannot enter the kingdom of God** (the realm of divine power, authority and spiritual potential). (v. 5) **That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.** Now here is something notable: after calling the disciples, and after cleansing the temple, Jesus first evangelistic encounter is with a **ruler of the Jews**, a Pharisee named Nicodemus who is not among the poor, destitute and downtrodden. He is spiritually impoverished—like all who strive to get into the kingdom in their flesh, or through ordinary means. I am sure that some of you may be able to identify with his futility and exhaustion. Salvation is not our work; it’s God’s domain. He saves whom he will, how and when and where he will. But those who are born again, doing what comes naturally now—after their transformation, or through their *participation* in divine life through the indwelling Christ—*it is always participation, not imitation. Our life in Christ is an effusion of his life; he is the fountain of living waters and we, new creatures in him, are the conduits. The* born again can do what they are told to do—no one else can. **Verily, verily, I say unto you, We**

do speak that we do know, and we testify that we have seen and you do not receive our witness. (v. 11) This declaration suggests to us, I think, that this encounter which we picture as a one-on-one was not in private—as was the private encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Who recorded this encounter? It must have been either Jesus, or the woman herself.

I recently cautioned the congregation about the real dangers of socialism—especially of the Marxist atheistic variety. Yes, something worrisome . . . I’m sorry. However I did so because in my devotions I was meditating on Psalm 73 and I was impressed by the correlation/similarity between the Marxist critique of Western culture (capitalism) and the struggle David was having with God’s moral governance of the universe. The Marxist view is that there is no divine governance at all and therefore no divine sufficiency, morally speaking, for man to be concerned about at all. *The naked universe is amoral and the elite make it all up!* Of course this is at odds with the view of biblical Christians. We believe that God is good, in fact the source of all goodness, and that God is capable to care for, to provide for, and to righteously govern the entire creation. God is inherently good, we believe, and loving, caring, just and merciful, and equitable as part of his righteous being. And we believe this despite what some might call *apparent discrepancies* such as the moral dilemma poised by the prosperity of the wicked and the poverty of the righteous. And that is a major theme of Psalm 73. The first sixteen verses lay out, shall we say, the case for the prosecution—God being placed in the witness box. The apparent injustice, remember is the charge—how can a purportedly good God allow the wicked to prosper while allowing the righteous to suffer deprivation? *This is not essentially a very good question because it is based on appearances only.* Superficially, we say, the question doesn’t cut deep enough and it implies, even imputes to God, an injustice that may not be relevant motivationally speaking.

Where do these questions come from? The question could arise out of love of God and a sense that his character warrants our defense. Of course it doesn’t for God’s ways are not our ways. To think, or express ill of God, to slander God is in essence blasphemous. So regardless of how perplexed, distressed and distraught we may be, over the circumstances of our lives especially the troubles, afflictions and difficulties—including the apparent unfairness of life (!), we should not wrongly impugn, or accuse God. This restraint is a virtue that we observe in the case of Job, who refused **to curse God**—or to permit his wife and children to do so either. And, because it is relevant to our current theme, Job had no idea of what was truly going on spiritually—the vindication of his faith against the vicious slander of Satan, the accuser. Remember there is cosmic warfare surrounding our lives, on a spiritual level, too. That said, we note that David is embroiled in just such a controversy over the goodness, or morality of God’s governance. It is a matter of equity, or, perhaps, the just distribution of wealth in the present world order. That, of course, is the great cause of socialism—they seek to redistribute wealth so as to achieve equality of outcome through parity of income. However, as I hope to show, it is not about the money—or the economy. Justice is neither up for grabs, nor subject to bribery or sale.

David starts the psalm with a crucial assertion: **Truly God is good to Israel.** And the prologue is epilogue, for that truth is a suitable conclusion to the psalm before we even get into it. Here’s what we are to make of this assertion, the setting for this discussion is bound by the covenant. David is not saying God is good to everyone; he is singling out Israel and claiming an in house restriction. So, amongst God’s chosen people, to whom God has promised good, there seems to be a moral discrepancy: the wicked prosper and the righteous languish. How is that good, or just? Or, how is it right, for God only does what is right! And do we do ourselves any favors by fretting over this matter?? Well, do we? So when I entitled this message “Do not fret,” I had *anxiety*, as in **Be anxious for nothing, but in everything with supplication and thanksgiving let your needs be made known** in mind. Pray, don’t panic. Your Father in heaven

knows your needs and is committed to meeting them--especially for those **who trust and obey**. Our trust in God's provision, a from above/divine point of view, is what enables us to keep anxiety in place! I'll get back to this.

But a divine point of view is key. Does God permit the wicked to prosper while the righteous suffer want and that is the sum total, or end of the matter? Well, no. David notes in verse 2 that he almost lost his footing in the great spiritual marathon that is this life—or, as in the case of Job, a great spiritual contest in which our choices either vindicate our faith, or prove us faithless. God is rooting for our faithfulness, Satan is mocking it as superficial, or as craven, fleshly and carnal. Well, who's right about us? David says, **For I was envious at the foolish, or boastful when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.** It wasn't simply that the wicked were prosperous, they were boasting, or flaunting it shall we say. They were ostentatious about their wealth—being loud about it, all puffed up. That may have irritated David, but his problem was somewhat deeper; he envied their wealth. How far do you think it is from envy to covetousness? An inch, a foot, a mile? I am certain that envy is forbidden along with covetousness, aren't you? Both are wasting diseases. These boastful folk had **no bands in their death**. This quaint phrase suggests that they lived a luxurious life and died a quiet death *as if they were sliding into a happy hereafter!* ***But that, we shall learn is not the case and that is why David's envy is terrible misplaced.*** But I run ahead, let me slow down. For the moment, in the present, they are careless, happy go lucky—life is an endless tailgate party. *But not really.* Portentous matters of judgment, or of eternal destinations (being heaven, or hell) are in the balance—they are simply oblivious, blinded by their sensuality, their fleshliness. They are egotistical, huge in their own self-esteem. (Poor self-esteem is rarer than we tend to assume.) We might say, “fat and sassy.” “They wear the livery, or garments of the devil fondly.” In this life they bragged, bullied, blustered and browbeat others, thinking themselves better than those who judged to be inferior. **Bulging eyes of fatness** is not a very flattering picture, but some of these braggarts are, in fact, quite swinish and obese in appearance. Really, David, you were envious of them? Well, he says he was.

Physical characteristics aside, let's look at their moral character. **They are corrupt.** Natural, fleshly and carnal man, says David, tend in this direction. Yes, despite being of Israel, despite being in covenant relationship, they have let themselves slip. As proud people they speak and act wickedly oppressing others. They picture the poor as lackeys, and slaves, only fit for toil to the indulgence of their betters. Brotherhood and mercy, and kindness and justice all die together in their estimation and practice. God rails against all of this repeatedly through his prophets, bringing the nation to its knees in judgment for such cruelty and social crimes. There was **no bone of my bones, or flesh of my flesh** consciousness amongst them. Now there are a couple of reasons that I want to insert this welcoming salutation of Adam, as directed to Eve here: 1. We've spoke of anxiety but we didn't note that the reason Christ forbade us to be anxious is his concern for our health, particularly our bone health. Anxiety and worry have a deleterious, harmful or damaging effect on our bones especially over long time spans—things such as osteoporosis and rheumatoid arthritis, lowered calcium levels and porous/brittle bones. (And, yes, I checked out the medical side of this and it appears to sustain the harmful and damaging effects of worry.) 2. In terms of being one flesh, as in marriage, affirming our unity of bone and flesh might deter much abusive behavior; 3. The fact that we ingest the flesh and blood of our Lord, in order to have his eternal life within us and we actually are the bone and flesh of his body (as well as his hands and feet!); 4. And the fact that he is the vine and we are the branches, drawing our vitality and newness from our union by faith with him. These truths make **bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh** essential to our unity and our identity in Christ.

That brings us to the parable of Dives and Lazarus—to catch a glimpse of what David may have seen in the sanctuary. The dishonest steward, in the previous parable, is likened to a covetous man, and those who commit adultery. This is a decidedly dark backdrop to the rich man’s tale. Is covetousness/greed the fault which taints Dives’ character? Surely he is quite self-preoccupied, spending all his wealth on himself—not caring for, investing in or blessing others with his wealth. Would it be fair to say he is unloving, and therefore unjust? Unlike the dishonest steward, or that man’s lord. Not even the dinner scraps which were reserved for the dogs, who licked Lazarus’ sores, were shared with the destitute man at his doorstep. The indifference amounted to cruelty, disclosing the mean streak to covetousness and greed. All of this is discussable, but I would suggest that ***Jesus is doing something quite profound here: he is disclosing the world as it actually is, a moral universe.*** And this world is the world that David discovered when, after all his seething questions, he sees the actual state of things: the rich in this world experience tremendous blessings *which they were meant to share, to win people to God and salvation, but if they did not use wealth as it ought to be used,* in the world to come, especially if they were covetous and wicked, they would suffer the loss of everything they thought advantageous in this world—they would be stripped of pomp, fashion, splendor and all the earthly benefits/comforts that come with prosperity! Remember we are talking just about evil men, thieves, scoundrels and oppressors.

The rich man also died and was buried. And in hell (not Abraham’s bosom!—here we learn that he was an evil rich man), **being in torment and seeth Abraham far off, and Lazarus in his bosom¹** (Dives sees heaven, the unattainable—for the way of love that led there was no longer open to him). Part of the torment of hell is that those who are kept therein, can actually see heaven, and with it all that they are missing and now deprived of. This evil doer, of whom we are charged “Not to fret!” Is conscious, cognizant and coherent. He is still a living soul with the capacity to see, to converse and to know his deplorable state—for what use is torment, ***a flaming torment*** if one cannot know, or sense that torment?! No, torment is real, knowable and painful to endure—especially forever and ever. ***That is how things actually stand—with wicked men of ill-gotten gains. All is loss, dispossession, deprivation, dissipation, in hell—non-reprieveably and irretrievably so. One is desolate and desolated, alone, isolated in the rags of eternal poverty.***

Until I went into the sanctuary of God, understood I their end.

I can’t number the times, in jail, that I hear prayer requests for God to make me a better person, or for God to help me make better moral life choices. Sometimes they even say, I want to be like Jesus. And, frankly, it makes me cringe because that is not the deal. The Lord doesn’t want to make you better, he wants to make you new. Transformation not imitation! He doesn’t want to patch us up, or morally improve us. It is total renovation not remodeling. He wants you to become a new creature in Christ—to have him in your center and not just on the periphery. He is the vine, you are the branches. He indwells you and lives in you and through that spiritual reality you participate in Him, truly and authentically. **Not I, but Christ in me.**

He desires for you to die in him/crucified with him, be buried in him, to rise in him, to be glorified in him and to ascend in him.

¹ **Abraham’s bosom** is a Jewish euphemism for “heaven.” As the Father of his people, Lazarus has been gathered to his people. This “father” is presented by Jesus in the “parable of the prodigal son” who when the son turns towards home runs to greet and welcome him home. We must remember that Jesus, the Son, was always exalting and lifting up the Father—**what I see Him doing, I do; what I hear Him saying, I speak—my words are not my own, they are the words of Him who sent me. And my words shall never pass away.**

Your fallen, human, fleshly and “natural” life has to go; and by faith the cross kills it, and slays sin, and destroys guilt, and cancels blame, and nullifies shame, Christ, the terminator! You are forgiven, cleansed and set free: a new, divine life has been implanted in you. You are completely new. Look at it this way, the radium of heaven has killed the cancer of human sin, shame and depravity! Jesus will more than straighten you out, the Holy Spirit will re-align you—better than a factory reset!

As long as you seek to follow Jesus, or to imitate Jesus, and work at being like him, in your loathsome, cursed self-life, you are doomed to fail. *It simply can't be done.* It's not your effort, your work, it's his grace, his transformation. It takes divine life within to effect the change that makes for spiritual transformation, and makes life abundantly possible. Bring it.

Then once you are changed by Christ, truly born again, as in dead and resurrected, through renunciation and death(!), you will cease to be anxious. Why? You will be dead to worry and alive to our blessed hope! The moral, spiritual expectations of you (as laid out in the Sermon of the Mount!) will become “natural” to you because you have become *supernatural*, that is, a spiritual being in essence, a child of God. You are new. The old has passed utterly away. Of course. Here are four scriptures to ponder:

Isaiah 43:19

“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”

Revelation 21:5

“And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”

Lamentations 3:22-23

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

Romans 6:4

“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Christ's life is the engine that drives the freight train of our lives. Therefore, we fret
not. **Amen.**