

No Middle Ground

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again, and welcome to Faith. We're so glad to be here together. We are going to be in Psalm 97, and we will be finishing up Psalm 97 this morning.

And if you remember last week, we talked about and asked the question, Who's in charge? What was the answer? Even if you weren't here, you ought to know, God is in charge.

That's like the Sunday school answer. No matter what question is asked, you always have the kid that says, Jesus. And most of the time, it's probably a correct answer.

So who's in charge? God is in charge. And the psalmist in Psalm 97 tells us that because God reigns, relax. Relax. And because God reigns, rejoice.

And God reigns, remember. Remember what God has done for others. Remember what God has done for you. Just remember what God has done, and it will help us to be continually giving praise to Him and be grateful for what God has done for us.

[1 : 12] And in this section of Psalm 97, in verses 10 through 12, through the end of the psalm, the psalmist calls God's people to remain loyal to Him and trust His future help and to trust His future blessings.

He also instructs those who love God to despise evil. And what we see is there's really no middle ground. We either love God and hate evil, or we play around with evil, and we're not showing truly that we love God.

The psalmist tells people that we should demonstrate loyalty to God through our outward acts, but also through our inward allegiance and our inward devotion to Him.

So what we also see is that, and we know that love for God is normal for the believer. Love for God is normal for those who follow Christ.

It's not something that we have to be taught. It's not something that we have to put on, because if we truly are thankful and understand and realize what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, that should foster the gratitude and the love that God, because He loved us first, we know that we, in turn, ought to love Him.

[2 : 45] Because God first loved us, we, in turn, can love God. And we are the happy recipients of God's love. Every one of us ought to understand and realize that God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

God's love was revealed at the cross of Calvary, and it also calls for our love in return. Also, what we understand is despising sin is normal for those who love God.

Because if we truly understand who God is, and if we truly understand the nature of God, and if we fully understand why Jesus had to go to the cross and die in our place, then we would have a hatred for sin.

And that would be normal for believers. If someone says they don't have a problem with sin, then I would venture to say, then I don't know if they're truly saved.

Because if we know, if we fully understand the gospel, we know that it's sin that made it necessary for Jesus to die on the cross in our place.

[4 : 05] And were it not for sin, Jesus wouldn't have had to die on the cross. We wouldn't have needed redemption. We would already be part of God's family, because we would have simply continued on from the Garden of Eden, and have been clueless as to what sin was.

But because Adam chose to take a bite of that fruit that was forbidden by God, at that moment in time, sin, disobedience, separated mankind from God.

And sin is what causes all human misery, all human suffering. Sin is what causes us to be separated from God.

And so hatred of sin should be normal for the Christian, just like love for God is normal for the follower of God. So let's see today's, let's see in today's text, let's look at Psalm 97, verses 10 through 12, and see how this text demands that we despise, that we despise evil.

Let's look at verse number 10. It says, You who love the Lord. What does he say next? Hate evil. If you love God. The psalmist is calling out to those who love the Lord.

[5 : 23] He started off in verse number 1, The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice. Let the multitude of the isles be glad. And he goes on in the rest of Psalm 97.

He talks about what God has done and shows how the Lord reigns, shows how the entire creation bears out that truth that God reigns.

And verse 7, Let all be put to shame who worship idols, worship carved images, images who worship gods who are really not God. And then in verse 10, he says, You who love the Lord.

This is the conclusion. Hate evil. He preserves the souls of his saints. He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.

Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holy name. So, if we love God, we will hate evil, as the psalmist says.

[6 : 29] And here's the thing. In life, our choices will either bless us or distress us. Our choices in life will either bring blessings or will bring distress.

So, what we're going to look at this morning is the things that we choose, or the way we choose, will determine the outcome.

The first thing we see in verse number 10 is we can either choose deliverance or danger. We can choose to be delivered by God because we live righteous lives, or we can choose the danger of playing around with evil.

Let's look back at verse number 10. He says, He preserves the lives of his saints.

The word souls here, when we say, and it's the same way we would use of a ship going down or a jet airliner going down.

[7 : 38] They say there were 137 souls who were lost. It refers to the lives that, it refers to their lives. And so, the psalmist is saying he preserves the lives of his saints.

He preserves those who are righteous. He preserves those who obey him, who follow him. He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. So, the Lord preserves those who live for him.

And rejecting compromise with evil brings deliverance from its consequences. When we hate sin, and we say, You know what? God said to live this way.

And when we choose to live by God's ordinances, by God's commands, then he preserves our life. What happens when we say, Well, you know, I know that's what God said, but this is what I want to do.

And we go against God's will or God's way. We end up paying the consequences. Very often, there are physical consequences.

[8 : 42] There are often emotional, psychological consequences to sin. Here's the thing. Sin may be fun in the moment, but all sin leads to negative consequences, ultimately.

And so, God says, You do things my way, you can rejoice, and I'm going to preserve your life. Now, does that mean that we will always be free of pain?

We will always be free of sickness? No. Because that's the human condition. We know that because we live in a sin-cursed world, we're going to get sick. We're going to run fever. We're going to get whatever.

But what's going to happen if we choose to live a righteous life and obey God and do things, stay away from the negative things and do the positive things that God says, we won't have to worry about the distress of the consequences of sin.

We can either choose deliverance or the danger that comes along with toying with sin. The Lord gives His best to those who live for Him. Now, we know that the Bible says, He sends the rain upon the just and the unjust.

[10 : 01] God gives harvest to the wicked as well as the sinner, as well as the saint. But we know that God takes and God always gives His best to those who are part of His family.

He always reserves His best to those who live for Him, those who trust Him. Spurgeon says this, or said this, Those who love the Lord will see His love revealed to them in protection from their enemies as they keep from evil.

All evil will be kept from them. And God deserves full commitment from those who love Him.

We read in Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. Verse 1 says, I beseech you, therefore, the Apostle Paul is urging believers. He says, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is what? Which is our reasonable service. Remember what we said the psalmist called God's followers to do? To live righteous lives.

[11 : 25] We show God that we love Him by our outward acts and by our inward allegiance. And so here, the Apostle Paul is saying, we show our commitment and our allegiance to God by giving our bodies to Him as a living sacrifice.

Everything that we do in our lives, we're doing it for Him. We're doing it as a living sacrifice, serving Him. And he says, it's our reasonable service.

It's only reasonable for what God has provided to us through our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ. And so we commit our lives to Him and live lives that are fully surrendered to Him.

It's our reasonable service. And verse number two, so do not be conformed to this world, to this world's image.

That word there, conformed, is literally the Greek word that means to be pressed, to be pressed into the mold.

[12 : 26] I've done this before as an illustration to these verses. And we can, it's a really simple thing that you can do. It's actually fun with little ones.

You take a coin and you take aluminum foil. And you take aluminum foil and you press it into a coin. And then when you take that aluminum foil off, what do you see?

You see the exact image of everything on that coin. You can even read the date. And you can read everything when you've pressed that aluminum foil into the face of that coin.

And so that's exactly what Paul is saying. He says, don't be pressed into the world's mold. Don't look like the world. Don't act like the world with rejecting God, with not believing that God is God, that God is powerful, that God protects, that God's ways are always best.

So Paul says, don't be conformed to this world's image, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That word metamorphosis. Just like when a butterfly comes from this ugly, little creepy crawly thing, and it goes into its chrysalis and it goes through the different stages and out pops a beautiful butterfly.

[13 : 49] That's a metamorphosis. A literal, complete change. What started off with is not what you end up with. What you end up with is something totally different from where it began.

So let's be transformed by renewing our mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. So we can either choose deliverance or we can choose danger.

The psalmist said, you who love the Lord hate evil. He preserves the souls of his saints. He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.

Secondly, we can choose light or we can choose darkness. We all have the same choice. As we go through our life, as we live our lives, we can either choose to live in the light, walk in the light, or walk in darkness.

Do our own thing. Live life according to Oprah or live life according to Dr. Phil. Live life according to whatever the world's latest and greatest ideas are.

[14 : 53] Or we can live in the light of the way God says we are to live. Verse 11, Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart.

So to love God demands walking in the light. That word that is saying here, light is sown, indicates the honor that God gives to those who are loyal to him.

God shines his light upon those who serve him. God shines his light for the path for those who obey him and for those who live righteous lives.

And he says gladness for the upright in heart. This is what we receive when we follow him. This is what we receive when we hate evil, we eschew evil, we despise evil, and we live lives, lives that are righteous.

So the upright in heart is a Hebrew word here that describes moral integrity. For those who display moral integrity, the psalmist said we can have gladness of heart.

[16 : 07] What is true about those who lie, those who cheat, those who steal, those who do everything that is what we would consider despicable?

What comes along with all of that? You're always looking over your shoulder. Now, there's some, unless you are, used to be called a sociopath, now it's called antisocial personality disorder, unless

you are one of those, you're going to feel some guilt and some remorse.

Chances are, when the law catches up with you, you're going to be incarcerated, you're going to lose your freedom. But in reality, they lost their freedom long before that.

But those who are moral, those who show moral integrity, the Bible says, will have gladness in heart because we can rejoice.

We don't have anything to worry about. We can go to sleep, as the psalmist says, and sleep in peace because we don't have to worry because what are we going to say because sometimes we have to tell a lie to make up for the previous lie we told and then we can't remember who we told which lie to.

[17 : 24] And it becomes too much. And so for those who despise evil, for those who say, God, I'm going to love you and I'm going to follow you and I'm going to live for you, they can have gladness in heart.

To love the Lord demands walking in the light. Those who follow Christ, those who choose light over darkness and follow Christ will not walk in darkness.

We see in John chapter 8, verse 12. Then Jesus spoke to them again. Jesus says, I am the what? I am the light of the world.

He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. It's amazing what happens when God gives us his Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, I have to go, but I'm going to leave you with a comforter. And I'm going to leave you with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is who teaches us. The Holy Spirit is who gives us light, who shines the light of God's truth upon into our minds.

[18 : 37] And when we have the Holy Spirit, we have the light. Those who have the Holy Spirit know that when they have a problem, when they're frustrated, when they don't know which way to turn, all we need to do is turn to God.

James says in the New Testament, in his letter, he says, if you don't know what to do, just ask God. In James chapter 1. He says, if you lack wisdom, just ask God, because he gives liberally, and he doesn't chide you for asking him, even though you ask him over and over and over again, he won't reprimand you for coming to him again and saying, God, I need you again.

I need your help. And for those of us sometimes who are slow learners, that's okay. God is long suffering. He doesn't mind. So he says, I'm the light of the world.

He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall but have the light of life. Charles Spurgeon again said, right leads to light.

In the furrows of integrity lie the seeds of happiness, happiness which develop into a harvest of joy. Let me read that again. Right leads to light.

[19 : 55] In the furrows of integrity lie the seeds of happiness which develop into a harvest of joy. Remember what we said about the upright in heart? It means moral integrity.

God has lightning for sinners and light for saints. I love the way you put that. God has lightning for sinners and love for saints. The gospel of Jesus wherever it goes sows the whole earth with joy for believers.

So we walk in the light. We follow God. We hate evil. We despise evil. We live in the light. We walk in the light. Paul said this in Romans 13 12.

He says the night is far spent and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light. So wherever we read we're reading that as believers as followers of Christ we should be following light rather than darkness.

The Bible says men love what? Darkness rather than light. And most of the time evil is done under the cover of darkness. Because we don't want to be seen by anyone else.

[21 : 03] We try to get away with it. We try to do it hiding it covering it in darkness when no one else will see. And Paul says let us cast off the works of darkness and let's put on the armor of light.

2 Corinthians 6 14. Light has no agreement with darkness and deserves no fellowship. There's no fellowship with light and darkness. And then thirdly we can either choose rejoicing or regret.

Think about our lives. Think about the times that we live for God. We did what was right. And we we displayed moral integrity. We can rejoice when we think about it.

We can say God thank you for giving me the grace. God thank you for providing the light. But what happens when we sin? What happens when we choose not to do things God's way?

We often have what? Regret. We regret that we spoke so out of turn. We regret that we said something to someone out of haste or out of anger or we regret that we succumb to our attempt succumb to temptation rather than doing what was right.

[22 : 21] And there's this cycle. We know what's right but we do what's wrong just like what Paul says in Romans chapter 7. We know what's right but then the more we try to do right we do wrong and then we regret it and we hate ourselves for it and we say we'll never do it again and on and on and on.

So we have we can either choose rejoicing or we can choose regret. We see in verse 11 light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart and in verse 12.

Rejoice in the Lord you righteous and give thanks at the remembrance of his holy name. Loving God and walking in the light brings rejoicing.

Disobeying God and walking in darkness brings regret. So we can either choose rejoicing or we can choose regret. thanksgiving we know flows from committed hearts.

Hearts that are committed to him. Compromising with the enemy compromise with evil will bring regret. And we as followers of Christ we hate evil.

[23 : 38] We despise evil because we love our holy God. The Bible says that in him is light and in God there is no darkness whatsoever.

And because of what sin has done to the human race God there is there will be no sin in God's presence. That's why Jesus needed to die on the cross.

That's why a perfect sinless spotless innocent had to die and had to pay the penalty. And because Jesus was God, eternal God, he could pay an eternal debt for all of mankind.

And so that is what Jesus Christ did for you and he did for me. We hate evil because we love our holy God. We rejoice in the righteousness of our Lord.

And we give thanks for God's holiness because it's God's holiness that makes our holiness possible.

[24 : 43] Loving God and hating evil becomes the compass of our life. So if we have a choice to make, if you are lost in the woods, if you are lost somewhere, you can always look at that compass and find true north.

Magnetic north, but we can always find north. We can always find where we need to go. And we always know, unless there's something wrong with that compass, it will always head us in the proper direction.

The same with God's way. If we have a choice, if we have a dilemma, what do I choose? Well, you choose light, you're going to be good.

Choose darkness, choose evil, choose to disobey God, there's going to be regret. It's going to take you along a path that you probably, it's going to take you to a destination that you had never intended to go.

So choose God. So as we, as we conclude, full surrender to him must be our goal. Fully surrender to God is our goal.

[26 : 01] And there is truly no middle ground. There's no room for us to sit on the fence. There's no room for us to just dip our toe in evil and say, well, you know what?

I'm still saved, but I'm going to have a little bit of fun. It's going to catch us. It's going to bite us one way or the other. And so no middle ground. Love for God can be measured by our hatred of evil. How much do we despise sin? How much do we, how much does sin cause us to say, oh, how that hurts God? And how much do we love our crucified and our risen Lord?

So no middle ground. As we look back at our text this morning, we can either choose light or we can choose darkness. We can choose rejoicing or we can choose regret.

Let's pray. Father, this morning, as we look into your word, Father, we thank you that as the psalmist tells us, you reign, you are in control.

[27 : 17] We can relax. You reign so we can rejoice. And Father, help us to remember all you've done for us. And because it is sin that sent Jesus to the cross of Calvary, help us to live a life that honors you, pleases you.

Help us to live a life of integrity, moral integrity, to know that we are whole inside and out and that we live lives that honor you, that glorify your holy name.

And Father, help us to do what you've called us to do. Help us help our lives to shine for you. Help us to be able to share the love of Jesus Christ in all our actions.

Help us to help the gospel to be on our lips. And Lord, help our lives as well to show that you are holy.

We thank you for each one here this morning. May we honor you and glorify you in all we do and all we say and all we think. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.