

What the Heart Wants
Psalm 37:1-9, Luke 12:29-34

Brothers and sisters, perhaps you had the opportunity, on your summer vacation, to go out for ice cream – because it was hot and ice cream sounded like a nice way to cool off.

But then you walked up to the ice cream bar – and you were confronted with an overwhelming array of flavors and options to choose from.

You could have Pistachio dream, Tiger Tail, Bubblegum or Cotton Candy, Pralines and Cream, Cookies and Cream, or Irish Cream.

Or instead of ice cream you could order frozen yogurt, gelato or sherbet - again in a wide variety of different flavors...

Now I don't know if you experience this as a dilemma – but for me it quickly devolves into a real crisis because I'm uncertain as to which flavor is going to provide me with the most satisfying ice-cream tasting experience.

Now I like vanilla, it tastes good - and if that was the only flavor available I would have no problem ordering a vanilla ice cream cone and thoroughly enjoying it as a cool treat.

But with all these options available, it has me wondering if maybe Rocky Road would be more satisfying?? Or what about Double Chocolate chunk?? Or – ooohhh... Marshmallow Peanut Butter Chocolate Chip Surprise!!!

I don't really know which one of these flavors is going to give me the most satisfying taste experience? Oh sure it may be a tasty ice cream treat – but will it be the most tasty ice cream treat?!

The last thing I want to do is make my choice and start eating my ice cream and end up going “meh... its ok, it's not really that great though...” I don't want to be disappointed.

So I mull over all these choices, not necessarily in my head per-say but rather I consider them in my heart in order to determine which one really appeals to me, to find the one

that feels right and appeals to me the most and then I will choose that one.

Because in selecting and eating the flavor which my heart really desires... I will experience the satisfaction of my desire – and it will be wondrous!

Forget about having ice-cream cooling you down on a hot day, this is now about satisfying the desires of my heart! Do you know what I'm talking about here?? Anyone else struggle with ice-cream like this??

Well brothers and sisters this is a good example of what it means to “listen to your heart” as the song which the band played as our opener this morning instructs us to do.

When we are in a situation where we are conflicted about what we should choose, what we should decide, or what course of action we should take...

The song's advice is to examine what we really think and feel and believe and want, deep deep deep down inside ourselves – pay attention to it, and follow it.

To really listen to our hearts we must get past superficial feelings, social convention, pragmatic choices and discover what it is that our hearts truly desire.

So that we won't miss out on that chance to find “true” love – *“when he's calling to you”*

So that we won't be stuck working in an office when our heart truly desires to be a singer,

So that we won't be forced into conformity and living out other people's expectations for us.

Because it is thought... that acting inconsistently with what your heart wants is disingenuous and inauthentic, and it's a common belief... that denying your heart's desires causes you

to live an unfulfilling and oppressive life and keeps you from realizing your full potential and it damages your soul.

Now brothers and sisters – this is ALL true... BUT – not in the way you might expect.

Let me explain. You see the human heart was created by God and part of its purpose is to guide and direct our lives through what it desires – I think that is the sense of what Ecclesiastes 3:11 means when it says rather cryptically that *“God has set eternity in their [our] hearts.”*

So brothers and sisters, we always start by acknowledging how something is a part of God’s good creation and what we might know about its created purpose, but then we need to look at what the scriptures reveal about how it is affected by the Fall into Sin.

In this case what impact does Sin have on our hearts and how does it affect their created purpose to guide us through what they desire?

Now you would be hard pressed to find a more explicit verse on this subject than Psalm 37:4 which we read this morning: *“Delight yourself in Yahweh and He will give you the desires of your heart”*

Now brothers and sisters, I think we can all agree that if scripture needs to instruct us to delight ourselves in God then that is not something which our hearts naturally desire, is it?

And because this is not what our hearts naturally desire, we usually understand this scripture verse as sort of a quid-pro-quo exchange - where if make ourselves focus on God instead of what our hearts really desire... then in exchange for doing that, God will then give us what it is that our hearts really want.

Sort of like doing your chores around the house to get your allowance which you can then spend on whatever it is that you really want to do with your time.

Now, you don't have to be a theologian to see this is a problematic way of understanding this verse right? I mean for starters it's a bit self-interested, and do we really think that just because we go to church and praise God and read the bible and give to charities that then God will reward us by granting us a desire to go on a fancy cruise, or have a dream house, or a high powered career and so on?

And what if our hearts desire something that is contrary to the law of God revealed in scripture and creation? Does He give us those desires?

What if our hearts desire sexual intimacy outside of God's design for marriage between one man and one woman – we desire pornography, fornication, adultery, or homosexuality?

What if our heart desires to seek vengeance upon someone who has hurt us?

What if our heart desires to be the center of attention with fame and fortune?

What if our heart desires only modest things which we do not have - but someone else does?

And what if God does not give us the desires of our hearts - what will we do then?

Keep those questions in mind friends, because the answers to them will become apparent as we explore the main theme of Psalm 37 - which we see right off the start in vs. 1 *"Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong."* And this is repeated in vs. 7 *"do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes."*

So brothers and sisters the implication is that Sin has affected the human heart and its guiding ability to such an extent that certain people and their actions are qualified as evil and wicked.

Psalm 37 answers the previous questions by showing that us that if God does not give us the desires of our hearts - then we

will take matters into our own hands and pursue those desires, regardless of whether they fall outside of God's laws or we break God's laws to fulfill them, and the rest of us will be tempted to follow suite.

But there is no good way to fulfill a desire that goes against God's law. You can't commit loving and faithful adultery... you can't take just revenge... you can't be humbly arrogant – right?

And even if your heart has only good and modest desires, you can't steal or cheat or lie or murder in order to achieve those desires – the ends do not justify the means.

And the whole point of Psalm 37 is to encourage God's people – back then and today – that when we see other people doing this and succeeding, we must not envy them or fret about it.

Brothers and sisters when other people get what their hearts desire and we do not... we must heed this warning in Psalm 37

because as you may already well know, this is the occasion where we are sorely tempted to be envious...

“Why do they get what they want and I do not, they do not have good motives for what they want... they are only self-interested... while I want to do good and help people but I can't!”

Brothers and sisters if we give into the temptation to envy in these situations then it will lead us to into fretting. And fretting is when we are consumed by our envy and worry and frustration as they all mix together and begin to undermine our trust in God and lead us into anger.

“Why does God let them get away with that?! They are succeeding in their wickedness – how can God bless that, it's like He's rewarding them for doing wrong?!”

And then as we begin to get angry with God and become wrathful towards those who are wicked – it does not lead us anywhere good. This is why vs. 8 says *“Refrain from*

anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.”

You see in our anger and wrath we will have either spoken falsely about God; that he’s letting them get away with it, or worse that He is blessing them for it!

Or we might decide that since it doesn’t seem to matter we’ll just go ahead and break God’s law to fulfill our desires or pursue what is outside God’s law because other people seem to get away with it.

So this is how we are lead into evil by our anger as a result of fretting and being envious – but brothers and sisters and we don’t want this... because vs. 9 warns us that *“For those who are evil will be destroyed.”*

They may get away with it for a time, maybe even for this life – but there will be a reckoning and a judgement upon evil that they will not escape and we don’t want to go down with them.

And have you considered the fact that their success is God’s punishment on them? They are not experiencing any of the consequences which may cause them to stop and repent... so God is not blessing them but giving them over to their sin!

Brothers and sisters Psalm 37 gives us a pretty clear picture of how Sin has affected our hearts and the impact which this can have on the direction of our lives – and it’s pretty serious.

So In in a certain way it is true that if we do not listen to our hearts and pay attention to what they really want we will end up living a life that is inauthentic and disingenuous and in the end it will do eternal damage to our soul – just not in the way we may have anticipated it.

So what do we do? We have our hearts, they are affected by Sin, we still desire what we desire for good or bad – so what do we do with all this?

Well brothers and sisters Psalm 37 gives us three positive actions that we can take to offset the effect of sin on our hearts desires and help us avoid falling into envy and fretting.

We are to Trust in Yahweh (vs. 3) Delight in Yahweh (vs. 4) and commit our way to Yahweh (vs. 5) and I am deliberately highlighting how Psalm 37 uses God's covenant name Yahweh here because the covenant context helps us understand how our frequent failures to trust and delight and commit our way to Yahweh open the way for Jesus Christ to come in and be that covenant partner who trust, delights and commits to Yahweh – perfectly - on our behalf.

Just think about how Jesus lived as he went about teaching, healing, and proclaiming the Kingdom of God was near. (*an encouragement to read through the Gospels*)

He did it in such a way that there was no hypocrisy when he instructed his follower – and us – saying *“Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the*

pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.” (Luke 12:29-30)

So Jesus lived this out and He taught it – and we can trust that Jesus' obedience was a substitute for our disobedience and inability – so that God considers us faithful Covenant partners who trust and delight and commit perfectly as Psalm 37 instructs us to.

That's the good news of the gospel that we can believe in – but it gets better.

Jesus gives us some practical clarity on Psalm 37:4 when He says *“But seek His [the Father's] kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”* (Luke 12:31) This is Jesus' explanation of what it means to delight yourself in Yahweh and to receive the desires of your heart.

So, that's helpful for us right – because the Kingdom of God is a more specific way to identify what it means to “delight in

Yahweh” and Jesus instructs us to seek it out, and... the Greek word in this verse for “seeking” can also mean “desire.”

So we are to desire the Kingdom of God and all our daily needs will be given to us as well.

Now let me try to tease out another layer of good news here between Psalm 37 and Jesus’ teaching in Luke 12 related to desires versus needs.

One of the ways in which we attempt to deal with what our hearts desire that is outside of God’s law is by distinguishing between wants versus needs right?

Our heart wants something - and we try to mitigate the effect of sin on our desire and how it can lead us into disobedience by discerning if we really need what we want – right?

And so for many of us this has led to a Christian life where we try to live simply and frugally just meeting our needs and not passionately pursuing any desires in life – because we know all

too well that our Hearts are affected by Sin and how that can lead us astray.

We simply do as Psalm 37:3 says *“dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.”*

But when Jesus instructs us to seek the Kingdom, it is in contrast to not worrying about our daily needs – these will be supplied. So in other words Jesus is calling us to focus on desire, what we want – and not what we simply need. Do you see how He is reversing this?

Now here’s the best piece of news – because I’d be a little worried about focusing on my heart’s desire without it – but Jesus says something pretty amazing in Luke 12:32.

He says *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” (vs. 32)*

The promise of Psalm 37:9 *“but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land,”* has now come true!

What Jesus wants us to seek out and desire and want... the Father is pleased to give us!

So we come full circle back to Psalm 37:4 and we see how this is fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ where now we can delight in Yahweh through Jesus and instead of thinking this is a trade-off to get what we really want, we understand it means is that we receive new desires in our heart for the Kingdom of God.

He will give us “the desires” of our hearts – so that what we desire is some part of His awesome and amazing Kingdom, and this is what begins to drive our life and shape our decisions and it begins to surpass those old desires so that we want them less and less.

Now – one final piece of good news so that you don’t go away from hearing this message thinking that somehow you are supposed try really hard and self-generate a desire for the Kingdom from inside your heart – that you are supposed to make yourself want it.

You see that is not God giving us the desires, is it..? Instead brothers and sisters trust and believe in the good news we hear in Galatians 4:6 where it says “*God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”*

So God pours out the Spirit of Jesus – the Holy Spirit – into our hearts and the Holy Spirit’s desires become our desires.

So what we want to pray for this morning is that God will pour out more of the Holy Spirit upon us – so that will we receive more desire for the Father’s Kingdom from the Spirit of Jesus – and we won’t leave here today feeling or believing this is something we need to produce ourselves but we will receive it from the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters may the Lord use this message today to “*direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.*” (2 Thess 3:5) Amen.