

Psalm 1

I. Psalm 1

A. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

II. Introduction to the Psalms

A. “The book of Psalms contains the whole music of the heart of man, swept like a harp by the hand of his Maker.”

B. Harriet Beecher Stowe: “It is worthwhile to have a storm of abuse once in awhile, for one reason to read the Psalms.”

C. One could preach a lifetime of sermons about the love of God, the judgment of God, the mercy of God, the beauty of his word, and the reign of Christ without ever leaving its pages.

D. For an introduction to this wonderful book, we could choose no better Psalm than the first.

III. Introduction to Psalm 1

A. The first Psalm introduces the rest of the Psalms.

1. In musical terms, Psalm 1 is the aria followed by 149 variations. The themes in this Psalm carry on throughout the remainder of the book.

2. “The first Psalm stands at the beginning of this book like a signpost, giving clear guidance regarding the way in which all God-fearing people should conduct their lives.”

IV. Verse 1 – Three Things the Righteous Man Avoids

A. As does the Sermon on the Mount, Psalm 1 begins with a beatitude.

1. The Hebrew word used here for “blessing” is sometimes translated “happy,” as for example in Psalm 144:15, and certainly a blessed person is generally a happy person.

a) But the blessedness of God's people is much deeper than superficial happiness. We know that happiness can be fleeting; blessedness is not. God's people are blessed even when they are unhappy.

b) We know there are many things in this life that will make us unhappy. Isaiah tells us that Jesus was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." (Isaiah 53:3) But while a Christian may at times be unhappy, a Christian is always blessed.

2. The blessedness that God provides looks beyond the temporal. It cannot be understood or enjoyed from a purely earthly perspective.

a) In 126:5 the Psalmist wrote, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

b) We must view this promise from an eternal perspective.

B. We learn from Verse 1 that, to be blessed, there are certain things a man does not do – ways in which he does not walk, paths in which he does not stand, and seats in which he does not sit.

C. In a beautiful example of Hebrew poetry, verse 1 uses three series of threes to tell us what we must avoid.

1. We must not walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

2. We must not stand in the way of sinners.

3. We must not sit in the seat of the scornful.

4. There are three degrees of conduct – walk, stand, sit.

5. There are three degrees of involvement – counsel, way, seat.

6. There are three degrees of evil – ungodly, sinners, scornful.

D. In each of these trios there is a regression away from God and a progression into sin and Satan's camp.

1. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:13 about evil men who wax worse and worse.

2. No one reaches the height of vice in a single step.

E. A blessed man does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

1. The Hebrew word translated here as "ungodly" or "wicked" means to be loose or unstable.

2. The Godly man does not allow himself to be guided by evil men.

a) Like the Psalmist in 119:115, we must be able to say “Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.”

3. To follow this command we must be able to discern the counsel of the ungodly.

a) The way to do that is to compare what we hear with what is in God’s word – which the Psalmist will discuss in just a moment.

b) The Bible opens with someone who lacked this ability. Eve was not able to discern ungodly counsel when it was spoken by Satan himself and when it contradicted something God had personally said to her not long before.

F. A blessed man does not stand in the way of sinners.

1. The Hebrew word translated here as “sinners” is an archery term that means to fall short or miss the mark.

2. The Hebrew word translated here as “stand” means to stop or to be firm.

3. To stand with someone is to adopt his way of life. When you stand with someone you are telling the world that you are on that person’s side.

4. Does the world know where we stand? Do our friends know? Do our co-workers know? There must be no confusion on where we stand.

G. A blessed man does not sit in the seat of the scornful.

1. The Hebrew word translated here as “sit” means to dwell, remain, or abide. It emphasizes a thoroughly settled state or condition.

a) According to the Hebrew idiom, when you sit in someone’s seat, you act like or become like what they are.

2. When a wicked man comes to the depth and worst of sin, he despises – himself, others, and ultimately God and his word.

a) Mockery and pride are twin evils.

(1) Proverbs 21:24 Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.

b) When someone mocks God, that person places himself above God. It is the ultimate separation from God.

c) We know that Satan is filled with pride, but I think he is also a mocker. In Matthew 4, for example, you can almost hear his sneering mockery as he tempts Christ.

d) Matthew 27 tells us three times that Jesus was mocked by the soldiers and the chief priests.

e) We are seeing today an ever increasing level of mockery and ridicule directed toward Christ and his word.

f) 1 Corinthians 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

3. How should we respond to such mockery?

a) If we keep our seat while others scoff at God and his word, then we are sitting in the seat of the scoffers.

b) Spurgeon: “Be out-and-out for Him; unfurl your colors, never hide them, but nail them to the mast, and say to all who ridicule the saints, ‘If you have any ill words for the followers of Christ, pour them out upon me. . . . but know this – ye shall hear it whether you like it or not - I love Christ.’”

4. God will have the last laugh.

a) Psalm 2:4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

b) “The seat of the scoffer may be very lofty, but it is very near the gate of Hell; let us flee from it, for it shall soon be empty, and destruction shall swallow up the man who sits therein.”

c) Galatians 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

H. What then do we learn from verse 1?

1. The Godly do not model their conduct on the advice of bad people; they do not linger in the company of evildoers; still less do they remain among the cynical who openly scoff at God.

2. We have seen what a godly man does not do; what does he do?

V. Verse 2 – The Key to Blessedness

A. Of all the qualities that could have been mentioned to characterize the life of the blessed man, the Psalmist tells us that the key quality is our relationship to the Word of God.

B. And that relationship is one of delight!

1. C. S. Lewis: “The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express that same delight in God which made David dance.”

2. The Hebrew word translated here as “delight” came from an Arabic verb that meant to be mindful of or attentive to, and so it came to mean to keep or to protect.

3. When something delights us, we become preoccupied with it and we tend to protect it and guard it.

4. If we delight in the word of God, then we read it and study it – and we love to do so!

a) We read books about the Bible; we listen to sermons about the Bible. We listen to the Bible in our car.

b) In short, if we delight in the word of God then we are at the very least interested in it – we find it interesting and we want to know as much as we can about it.

c) Clearly, if we are bored by the word, then we do not delight in the word. And if that is our situation, then we should not expect the blessedness promised in this Psalm.

C. What does it mean to delight in the law?

1. If we asked people today what they delight in, I think very few if any would say the law – either the law of man or of God.

a) Most people likely see the law as H. L. Mencken did: “Say what you like about the Ten Commandments, you must always come back to the pleasant truth that there are only ten of them.”

2. But delighting in the law of God is essential to Godliness.

a) Psalm 119:92 Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.

b) Our delight in God’s law is an indicator of our love of God. What is love without delight?

c) Love sweetens our obedience and makes the law not a burden but a delight.

3. I fear that today for many religion has become an agony rather than a delight – a religion that haunts rather than helps – and that is very far from what God intends for his people.

D. What does it mean to meditate on the word?

1. In eastern meditation, the goal is to empty the mind. In Christian meditation, the goal is to fill the mind with God's word.
2. Meditation is to reading what digesting is to eating.
3. It is more than just reading the text, although reading of course is required. Meditation is what happens after we read.
 - a) As every student knows, sometimes when we read, the words just pass through our minds like water in a pipe.
 - b) We must read to understand, and after understanding we must change our lives to fit what we read.
 - c) Psalm 119:18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

E. And we are to meditate day and night.

1. "Day and night" is an idiom that means "constantly, consistently, and regularly."
2. The word of God must be on our minds and in our hearts at all times and in every situation and area of life.
3. A practical observation is that it is impossible to follow this command without memorizing at least some portions of God's word.
 - a) Psalm 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.
 - b) It is easy to sometimes leave a sermon saying to yourself, "Well, that sounds good, but what can I do to put any of that into effect?" For tonight's lesson, the answer is simple – memorize a verse and think about it throughout the day, and then do the same the next day and then the next.
 - c) After a few months on that new diet, you may find that you begin to grow spiritually just as a malnourished child would begin to grow after starting to receive a proper diet.
 - d) What is the key to spiritual growth? Volumes could be written in response to that question, but for some the first step might be as simple as writing a verse on the back of a 3 by 5 index card!

VI. Verse 3 – What the Righteous are Like

A. The righteous man is like a tree. What can we learn from this simile?

1. A tree has deep roots and is very sturdy.

a) It has been said that a Bible that is worn and falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't.

b) The blessed man has in his life the stability of a tree. Let the winds blow, let the rains come, let the drought burn, the tree stands.

2. A tree grows slowly and consistently over time.

a) The blessed man experiences growth throughout his life. He grows in knowledge and in grace as he takes nourishment from the word of God.

3. A tree bears fruit in its season.

a) Not only is there permanence in a tree but there is productiveness.

b) The blessed man is useful to God and useful to others. We will see in a moment that a chief characteristic of the wicked is their uselessness. Not so with God's man.

c) And the fruit comes in its season. The branch of the palm tree can be used to wave in victory or to make a shade for grief. God's man bears fruit appropriate for the season.

B. The verb translated "planted" in verse 3 really means to transplant.

1. This tree has been taken from one environment and placed into another that is more conducive to its production, growth, and stability.

2. Also, the leaves on this tree shall not wither. God's trees are evergreens.

C. Whatever the blessed man does will prosper. What does that mean?

1. In 37:7, the Psalmist tells us that the wicked will prosper "in his way" – that is, in his own way.

2. They prosper and excel at wickedness and the temporary gains that it can produce.

3. But the blessed man prospers in God's way and will reap the permanent gains that only God can provide.

4. True prosperity is spiritual prosperity. All else is fleeting. Our treasures must be laid up in Heaven.

VII. Verse 4 – What the Wicked are Like

A. Verse 4 begins with a very strong contrast – “The ungodly are not so.”

1. Grammatically, this is an emphatic denial – the way of the wicked is nothing like the way of the righteous.

2. They have completely different lives, different purposes, different motivations, different characters, and different results – both in this world and in the next.

3. Unlike the righteous, the wicked are rootless and fruitless.

B. We have seen in verses 1-3 what the wicked are not like; verse 4 tells us what they are like – they are like chaff.

1. Chaff is the seed covering and the debris separated from the grain during threshing.

a) It has no body or substance and is blown about by the wind; it is always unstable.

(1) The wind cannot harm the tree, but it destroys the chaff.

b) Isaiah describes the wicked in very similar terms.

(1) Isaiah 57:20-21 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

c) Chaff is worthless; it has no use.

(1) The wicked man has nothing to offer but his wickedness. He has no fruit.

VIII. Verse 5 – What the Wicked Cannot Do

A. Mankind thinks it can do anything – conquer the world, conquer the universe, and even conquer death. But verse 5 tells us that there are things the wicked cannot do – there are places they cannot stand.

1. And this would likely come as quite a surprise to the wicked – they believe they can stand anywhere. But they cannot.

B. The wicked cannot stand in judgment.

1. Like the chaff is separated from the grain, like the wheat is separated from the tares, and like the sheep are separated from the goats, the wicked will be separated from the righteous in judgment.

2. “The end of the wicked may not be clear while they are alive and busying themselves with wickedness, but from God’s perspective the wicked have no future. They will not withstand the judgment of God.”

C. The wicked cannot stand in the congregation of the righteous.

1. Today, the congregation of the righteous is the church. We are added to that church when we are saved, and so no wicked person can ever stand in that congregation.

2. Jeremiah describes the church in these terms in 31:33-34.

a) “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

b) “For they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them.”

D. The wicked cannot stand today in the church unless they repent of their wickedness and obey the gospel, and the wicked cannot stand in judgment on the final day. On that day, they will understand that they are but chaff – and they will see in a new light those who appear as chaff to the world but who are in reality beautiful trees.

IX. Verse 6 – What the Wicked Must Face

A. What does it mean that the Lord knows the way of the righteous?

1. That the Lord knows the way of the righteous means that the Lord knows those who are on his side.

a) 2 Timothy 2:19 “The Lord knoweth them that are his.”

b) In an ordinary kingdom, all of the people know the king, but the king does not know all the people. That is not the case in God’s kingdom.

B. And what about the way of the wicked? It shall perish.

1. The chief characteristic of the wicked is that they have their eyes set upon this life only.

2. The wicked are bent on getting all the gusto they can out of this life with no regard for God or eternity.

3. And if this world is all there is (as they believe), then why not go for the gusto? Isn't that what Paul said?

a) 1 Corinthians 15:32 "What advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die."

4. But this is not all there is, and those who have believe it is will have an eternity in which to regret that mistake.

5. The way of the wicked will perish.

C. Note that the wicked are said here to have a way.

1. It is significant that the Bible often thinks of religion as a way.

a) It is not a creed or theology or a system – it is a way of life.

b) John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

c) Everyone is walking on a way – either a way that leads to death or on the way that leads to life.

2. It is sobering to think that when God looks at this world, he sees only two types of people – those who are beautiful trees planted in his well-watered garden and those who are chaff being blown about by the winds of wickedness and despair.

X. Conclusion

A. There is a famous poem called "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost. That poem ends with the memorable line:

1. "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-- I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference."

B. Psalm 1 tells us there are two spiritual roads – the way of the righteous and the way of the ungodly. There is not a third.

1. Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 7:13-14.

a) "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: 14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

2. Like the poet, the righteous man takes that less-traveled road – and it makes all the difference.

C. But what about those on the other road?

1. As we noted earlier, Psalm 1 begins with the word “blessed.” We note now that it ends with the word “perish.” Eternal destruction is what awaits those on that wide road.

D. Psalm 1 has been called the doorkeeper to the Psalms; it presents those who would enter with a choice – and you have that same choice tonight. Are you God’s person or are you not?

E. If you are God’s person, then follow the command of Paul.

1. Colossians 2:6-7 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: 7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

F. If you are not God’s person, then follow the command of Peter.

1. Acts 2:38 Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.