

THE LORD KNOWS THE WAY OF THE BLESSED!

Psalm 1: 1-6 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Today begins a series of “I don’t know how many messages” on the Psalms or on a combined series of clustered psalms. Why does God want us to go to the Psalms for a series of messages? The psalms, all 150 of them, teach us how to praise God. They teach us how to relate to God as our personal Friend, Savior, and Shepherd. The psalms teach us how to meditate and reflect on what God has done for us. The psalms call us, over and over, to enter into the experiences of each of the psalmists, David, Asaph, Moses, the sons of Korah, and the other psalm writers. The psalms over and over address our thinking, our minds, but they arrive in our minds by the road of our hearts. The psalms will make us smile and laugh, but often the psalms will open the windows of our heart and help us cry. If you never cry reading the psalms, I question if you have read all the 150 psalms. The psalms cover every sort of experience and emotion we all have. These experiences are not just praise and thanksgiving, but prayer, and doubt, depression and despair. The psalms call us to learn to encounter God and reach out to Him in the middle of all our messes and in all of our moments of life, not just in the good times, but in all our circumstances. The Psalms are out to help us grow, and I believe we all will grow in this series.

Perhaps, there is a reason Psalm 1 is the first psalm. It seems that Psalm 1 is a gateway to all 149 of the other psalms. Perhaps the order is not a random selection. Perhaps, this psalm is a doorway, an entrance, and an introduction to all the psalms that follow. Today, Jinny and I are going to fly down to Florida to attend some board meetings of RIMI—Reaching Indians Ministries International. We will go to the airport, but before we get to get on the plane, we will be asked to line up and go through security. I will take off my boots, my belt, empty my pockets of change and my wallet, take off my watch, and watch my belongings go through a scanner to make sure my reason for flying is in the best interest of everyone else going aboard. I’m glad all the others flying have to do what I am doing, as it gives me a better feeling about flying than if I were wondering if someone on the plane was out to mistakenly try to make it to heaven by blowing up our plane. There are people that believe those wild kind of thoughts. Psalm 1 is going to take us successfully through security. Before we look at the Lord as our Shepherd, our Messiah, our Forgiver, our Source of true worship, and so much more, we must start here. This psalm is going to pave the road to the rest of our journey. Just as a man or woman look at our airline ticket and

look at our license with a little blue light, just as they examine our attaché case and our carry-on luggage, just as they scan our checked in luggage, these workers are making sure not only that we want to make this journey, but they are making sure if they want to take us.

In this case, at this security line, God is speaking to us in Psalm 1 about (1) what path we are on, (2) what pleasures we are enjoying and anticipating up ahead, and (3) what promises or guarantees we can expect as we embark on our journey. In essence, Psalm 1 is a screen, a grid to weed out any folks making the journey that aren't serious about the trip. So get in the security line with me this morning and let's answer the three questions—(1) What Path Are We On As Blessed People Of God? (2) What Pleasures Are We Enjoying And Anticipating On the Path Ahead? (3) What Promises And Guarantees Can We Expect As We Embark On Our Journey? Psalm 1 will take us through security now and allow us to take off on this journey to a deeper walk with Jesus through the Psalms. Let's go through the line in Psalm 1, step by step by answering these three questions.

WHAT PATH ARE WE ON AS BLESSED PEOPLE OF GOD? (I.)

How do we know if we possess the ticket to earthly and eternal blessedness? What must we do to enter this path, getting past security? Jesus said in Matthew 7: 13, 14, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” What path are you on? Have you passed through the narrow gate? Jesus is the only door that leads to eternal life. I read in Psalm 1: 1, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.” The path of the blessed is not the broad easy way—it's not I-80. Yet, the narrow way is the blessed path. I read “Blessed or How blessed! The meaning of this Hebrew word, **esher** is “Oh, the happiness, or how happy. It occurs 44 times in the Old Testament and all but 4 times, this word occurs in poetic passages. There are 26 blessed's from this meaning in the Psalms and 8 in the Proverbs. This blessed path we find in Psalm 1: 5, 6 is called the congregation of the righteous or the way of the righteous. This is the path where God's children know the smile of God. This is the path where you don't have to keep searching. So stop at the security line and decide. What kind of path do you want to be on? Joining the congregation of the righteous isn't a death sentence or a sentence to instant misery and sadness. The highway of holiness, the path of the righteous is the path of blessedness—“Oh, the

happiness!” Blaise Pascal once said it this way. “There once was in man a true happiness of which now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these all are inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.” That is the path of the righteous. We have that God-shaped vacuum every human being has, and it has been filled by the Giver of joy and happiness. Our spirits have been filled by God Himself. The godly commentator, John Trapp, in 1877, wrote that “philosophers only beat the bushes for happiness, but God tells us in Psalm 1 that he has put happiness into our hand in the way of the righteous.” Notice how our path is different from the world, 3 ways separated from their way.

On our blessed path, (1) we don't believe the counsel of the wicked.

“Notice verse 1—“How blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.” We listen to the voice of God. We are not tuned in to the trade winds of the world. What does that mean for us? Let me tell you a precious true story of a missionary pastor and his wife who live in the Philippines. Twenty four years ago, Bob and Pam were serving as missionaries to the Philippines and praying for a fifth child. Their two daughters Christy and Katie, and brothers, Robby and Peter were praying with their parents for another child. All the children were home-schooled by their mother. She worked diligently to instill the family's Christian beliefs into their hearts. Then, unexpectedly, Pam contracted amoebic dysentery, a life-threatening infection of the intestine caused by a parasite, a pathogenic amoeba found in contaminated food or drink. She went into a coma and was treated with strong antibiotics before they discovered she was pregnant. Because of the drugs used to awaken and rouse Pam from the coma and to treat her because of her amoebic dysentery, the fetus Pam was carrying experienced a severe placental abruption. Placenta abruptio is the separation of the placenta (the organ that nourishes the fetus) from its attachment to the uterus wall before the baby is delivered. Doctors therefore fully expected a stillbirth. They gave urgent counsel, recommending an abortion to protect Pam's own life. Yet abortions are illegal in the Philippines. Bob and Pamela sought God's Word and they prayed. They decided not to have an abortion. The doctors continued to counsel Pam to abort the baby for her own safety. They told her that the medicines had caused irreversible damage to her baby. Pam and Bob refused the abortion. They told the doctors that their Christian faith was the reason for their hope that their son would be born without the devastating

disabilities their physicians predicted. The doctors insisted that the baby inside her had no life at all. They said it was only a mass of fetal tissue. During the pregnancy, Pam nearly lost their baby four times. Yet she refused to obey the counsel to have an abortion. Pam pledged to God with her husband: “If you will give us a son, we'll name him Timothy and we'll help him become a preacher.” Pam ultimately spent the last two months of her pregnancy in bed. She eventually gave birth to a healthy baby boy August 14, 1987. Pam's son is indeed a preacher. He preaches in prisons, makes hospital visits, and serves with his father's ministry in the Philippines. He also plays football. Pam's son is Tim Tebow. The University of Florida's star quarterback became the first sophomore in history to win college football's highest award, the Heisman Trophy. His current role as quarterback of the Denver Broncos has provided an incredible platform for Christian witness. Pam now speaks on behalf of women's pregnancy resource centers across the country. Pam Tebow believes that every little baby we save matters. May her tribe increase! She walks the blessed path, not in the wicked's counsel.

On our blessed path, we don't behave like the sinners. (2) Notice verse 1, “Blessed is the man who doesn't stand in the way of sinners.” Mark this well. The blessed path is a path that ultimately rejects the home field advantage the world has, and unlike some referees, those on the blessed path make hard calls and stand for truth, even in the face of the boos of the crowd. Not long ago an old lady on the blessed way of righteousness was interviewed. She was 106 years old. When asked what she liked about her age, she said, “No peer pressure.” Not standing in the way of sinners isn't always easy. Yet on the blessed path of righteousness, we don't have to stand for truth in a “grin and bear it” attitude. No our delight, verse 2, is in the law of the Lord in which we meditate day and night.

On our blessed path, we don't belong with the wicked—the scoffers. (3) v. 3 Eugene Peterson calls these three positions by interesting names. He calls the counsel of the wicked, Sin Saloon, the way of sinners, Dead End Road, and the seat of scoffers, Smart Mouth College. The Hebrew word for scoffers is **luwts**. It means to make mouths at, to scoff, to scorn, and to mock. Notice verse one—“We don't sit in the seat of scoffers.” Those on the path of the righteous, feel out of place, for very long, mocking and jeering in the devil's crowd. We learn not to choose the seemingly okay things to do so we can do awesome things for God and with each other. We say no to the world's appeals and take our signals from the Lord. What path are we on as

people of God? Are we today on this path—the narrow way? Be honest. Have you passed through security to the path of the righteous? Secondly,

WHAT PLEASURES ARE WE ENJOYING AND ANTICIPATING ON THE PATH AHEAD? (II.) Notice now that if you have passed through the narrow gate, through security, there are pleasures forevermore. David says in Psalm 16: 11, “You make known to me the path of life; In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Here in Psalm 1: 2, the psalmist says, “But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.” Like a cow chewing his cud until it passes through the digestive track in 4 steps, we need to chew the Word of God. Meditate comes from the Hebrew word **hagah**. It means to imagine, to ponder, and study over and over in our minds. Meditating is one of God’s richest pleasures we enjoy. We delight in the law of the Lord. The Word has captured our attention. J.I. Packer defines meditation as “calling to mind, thinking over, dwelling on, and applying the Word to what we know about the works and ways and purpose and promises of God. It is holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under His eye, by His help, and is a means of communion with God. It is talking to ourselves about God and reasoning our way out of moods of doubt and unbelief into a clear apprehension of God’s power and grace.”

We find as the Scripture says that the Word is our food—Job 23: 12, Mt. 4: 4, our light- Psalm 119: 105, our truth, John 17: 17, our mirror, James 1: 23-25, our water, Eph. 5: 25-27 that cleanses us, quenches our thirst, John 4: 13-14, that refreshes us-Psalm 119: 150, it is imperishable seed, I Peter 1: 23, it is our sword, Hebr. 4: 12, Eph. 6: 17, it is a hammer, Jer. 23: 29 that builds up, Prov. 16: 24, and that judges, Rev, 2: 16, 19: 15, and it is a fire, Jer. 20: 9, Luke 24: 32. Do you ever get discouraged about the future of the church. Carl F. H. Henry, former editor of Christianity Today, on his last visit to Southern Seminary before his death, heard the professors lamenting the miserable shape of the church, about so much doctrinal emptiness, spiritless preaching, non-existent discipleship. They asked Dr. Henry if he saw any hope in the coming generation of evangelicals. I will never forget his reply. “Why, you speak as though Christianity were genetic. Of course, there is hope for the next generation of evangelicals. But the leaders of the next generation might not be coming from the current evangelical establishment. They are probably still pagans. Who knew that Saul of Tarsus was to be the great apostle to the Gentiles?” Who knew that God would raise up C.S. Lewis or Charles Colson? They were unbelievers who, once saved by the

grace of God, have become mighty warriors for the faith. The next Jonathan Edwards might be the man driving in front of you with the Darwin Fish bumper decal. The next Charles Wesley might be a misogynist, a hater of marriage, a profanity-spewing hip-hop artist right now. The next Billy Graham might be passed out drunk in a fraternity house right now. The next Charles Spurgeon might be making posters for a Gay Pride March right now. The next Mother Teresa might be managing an abortion clinic right now. But the Spirit of God can turn all that around. He seems to delight to do so. The new birth doesn't just transform lives, creating repentance and faith; it also provides new leadership to the church, and fulfills Jesus' promise to gift his church with everything needed for her onward march through space and time (Eph. 4:8-16). After all, while Phillip was leading the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ, Saul of Tarsus was still a murderer." One of the greatest pleasures of the path of righteousness is the transformation God has made in all of us. There are millions of other pleasures. This is just the beginning. Thirdly,

WHAT PROMISES, GUARANTEES, AND DESTINY CAN WE EXPECT AS WE EMBARK ON OUR JOURNEY. (III.) Notice verses 3-6. There are four promises: ***(1) We will be planted by streams of water*** just like a flourishing fruit tree that yields its fruit in its season, and whose leaves do not wither. v. 3. The psalmist knew that the Israelites knew how hard it was to grow a tree in the arid climate of Israel, so similar to Rock Springs. The only place trees not only survived, but thrived was by streams of water, planted close to the bank of a river. We who are on the path of righteousness live on the bank of the river of the water of life, and we continually draw our nourishment from the Lord. The picture is vitality, stability, security, fruitfulness, and no withering. ***(2) We won't blow away as the wicked do, in high winds—like chaff or tumbleweed.*** v. 4.—“The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff that the wind drives away.” Chaff is the outer husks of wheat separated from the heads of wheat in the threshing floor. Horses would walk on the wheat a while. Then the farmers would throw the grain into the air and the wind would carry the chaff away. The wicked are windblown, always carried away by every wind of doctrine. Their lives are rootless and ruined. Those on the path of life are promised vitality in the worst of storms, because our roots are connected to the stream from the throne of God. ***(3) We aren't destined to stand in judgment with the wicked nor will the wicked stand with us in the judgment.*** God will separate the sheep from the goats. Matthew 25: 31-46. Notice v. 5—“Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” John said in I John 3: 2-3, “Beloved, now are we the sons of

God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is, and He that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself even as He is pure. In our evil world, who can tell as we go shopping or go to work what our destiny is. Jesus gave a telling parable in Matthew 13: 24-30-36-43. Beloved, if you are on the blessed path of the righteous, you aren't destined to be burned with eternal fire in judgment. ***(4) We are destined for the blessed destiny of God's children whom He knows.*** Notice verse 6—"For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Beloved, don't rest on your works or your goodness. Rest on the goodness of God who has sealed us by His Spirit. His seal is on our souls. He knows—I love these words, "But the Lord knows the way of the righteous." I close with Jesus' own words in Matthew 7: 21-23. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do mighty works in Your name?' And then I will declare to them. 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

Today, have you passed security, through Jesus, the door, have you passed through security? Are you on the blessed path? Are you experiencing the delights and pleasures of the blessed path, especially the delights in the Word of God? Are you enjoying and anticipating the promises, the guarantees, and the destiny of those on the blessed path?