

The Two Roads
Psalm 1
Redeemer City Church
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Good morning, everyone, It is good to be with you all again this morning. If you have a Bible with you, please open it up to Psalm 1. This Psalm is a wisdom Psalm. In fact, Psalm 1 plays a unique role among the psalms as it introduces the entire psalter. It is the very first psalm for a reason. Not only does it introduce the book of Psalms it also functions as an introduction to the entire wisdom genre in Scripture.

It does this by describing two paths in life. There is the path to righteousness and life, and the path to wickedness and death. This Psalm describes for us the nature of the path of righteousness and the benefits that are gained by following this path as well as the curses that will come from rejecting this path and following the path to wickedness. And that is the essence of wisdom literature. There are five books of the Bible that fall under the category of wisdom literature, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. These books all function together to flesh out this idea that there is a right and wise way to do things that leads to life and prosperity and there is a wrong and foolish way to do things that results in suffering and death. That is the point of wisdom literature and that is what Psalm one is doing. It is telling us what it looks like to follow the right path in life and what the many benefits of following this path are as opposed to the path that leads to death.

I cannot help but reminded of the classic poem by Robert Frost, the Road Not Taken. Which goes like this:

The Road Not Taken
Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
 And having perhaps the better claim,
 Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
 Though as for that the passing there
 Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
 In leaves no step had trodden black.
 Oh, I kept the first for another day!
 Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
 I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
 Somewhere ages and ages hence:
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
 I took the one less traveled by,
 And that has made all the difference.

Now this poem isn't necessarily about life and death, but it does highlight that way leads on to way and choosing the wrong path can make all the difference. Psalm 1 tells us exactly that. It tells us that there are two paths in life, two roads that we can tread, and which one we choose will make all the difference.

So, hear now the Word of the Lord Beginning in Psalm 1 verse 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;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
 In all that he does, he prospers.

⁴ The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

The Two Roads

As I have already stated, this Psalm introduces the Psalter and the entire wisdom section in the Bible, and it does so by introducing a common theme. The Bible is consistently teaching us that there are two possible outcomes for your life, and there are two paths to get there.

Moses says that exact thing in Deuteronomy 30:19 where he says this

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live
Deuteronomy 30:19 ESV

There is before you, life and death, blessing and curse. Jesus says the same things. He tells us there is a wide gate and a narrow gate. There are good trees and bad trees. There is wheat and there are weeds. There are sheep and there are goats.

The Bible is consistent and constant in reminding us that there when all is said and done there are only two possible outcomes. We have set before us a Road to life and a Road to Death, so this morning we will take some time and see what Psalm 1 teaches us about the Road to life and then we will turn our attention to the Road to Death.

The Road to Life

The First thing we see is that the road to life can be identified by

1. Intentional Separation

We see this right away in verse 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; (Psalm 1:1 ESV)

Before we unpack this more, I want you to notice something here. Notice how the language escalates and intensifies. It begins with walking in the counsel of the wicked, then progresses to standing in the ways of sinners and finally moves to sitting in the seats of Scoffers.

And that is what happens isn't it. When we allow sin to creep into our lives when we compromise and go along with the ways of the world, we begin by accepting its advice, and then slowly but surely, we become party with its ways, and then finally, and often without even realizing it, we become mired in the attitudes and lifestyle of the World.

When we compromise on the unpopular teachings of the Bible we open the door to undermine and question everything the Bible teaches. When we decided that what the world thinks is more important than what God says than we invite disaster and ruin. When we no longer acknowledge the inerrancy and authority of Scripture we lose all solid ground.

And it starts with small compromises, then they get bigger, and soon enough you aren't anywhere close to walking on the path to life. You are firmly entrenched; you are sitting in the seat of scoffers. You have scorned and rejected wisdom and life for the ways of the world.

Listen friends, The Road to Life cannot be followed by adopting the mindset of the world around us, it cannot be followed by following the ways of the world, it can't even be followed by accepting the advice of the world.

The Road to death says, "Follow your heart", "let your heart be your guide" whereas the Road to life tells us that:

The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV)

So, Psalm 1 tells us that we have to CHOOSE. WE have to be DECISCIVE. We cannot allow Ourselves to be influenced by the world and by God. We cannot have two masters. We must choose what we will allow to shape our thinking.

Because what you allow to shape your thinking will determine which Road you take.

The Path to life and the Path to death do not run parallel you cannot follow the path to life and hold hands with those on the path to Death; you cannot be partnered with those on their way to destruction. You cannot walk in their counsel and maintain your place on the Road to life.

There is only room on the Road to life for those who are intentionally Separate, for those who have chosen this day who they will serve, who have pledged their loyalty, their allegiance, and their life to the one who has purchased them by his blood.

That's the first thing we see about the road to life, the second thing we see is that the Road to life is defined by:

2. A Love for the Law of God

This is a straightforward observation. We see it clearly in verse 2

but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law, he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:2 ESV)

So, we must love the law of God. And we must meditate upon it. These are straightforward instructions, but they are also ones that give us a lot more trouble than we would like to admit.

You see God doesn't simply want your obedience. Obedience can be motivated by any reason, it can be motivated by fear, or selfish ambition, or any number of things.

God wants obedience that is motivated by LOVE. LOVE for him which extends to a Love for his commands. Jesus himself says in John 14:15

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15 ESV)

Brothers and Sisters, a heart that is headed down to Road to life is a Heart that loves the Lord and loves the instructions of the Lord. It is not constantly looking for loopholes or ways that it can get away with paying lip service to the law and still doing whatever it wants.

A heart that is headed down the Road to life doesn't prioritize cottaging, snowmobiling, or sports over gathering together as the body of Christ. It doesn't look at the Bible's command to not neglect gathering together and say "well that doesn't apply to me, I'm not neglecting that gathering when I miss most Sundays throughout the summer." A heart that loves' the Lord and delights in his law is a Heart that longs to be here on Sunday morning. It is a heart that sees God's instructions as life giving and transformative, not as a burden and obligation.

Consider how David describes his love for God's word in Psalm 119: 9-16

9 How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
10 With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!
11 I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.
12 Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes!
13 With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.
14 In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.
15 I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.
16 I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word. (Psalm 119:9-16 ESV)

Brothers and Sisters, I would encourage you to read through Psalm 119. This is one of the most excellent chapters in all of Scripture on the Beauty and Goodness of God's Word. I would

encourage you to pray through Psalm 119 repeatedly, until you learn to love the law of our God.

And then meditate upon the law, upon his Word, study it, ponder it. Read it aloud to yourself. Internalize the law of God that you would increase your delight in it.

Now, the third defining trait of the Road to Life is Fruitful Endurance

3. Fruitful Endurance

Look down to your Bibles with me to verse 3, it reads:

He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers." (Psalm 1:3 ESV)

Here we see that a person who is on the road to life will not wither and that they will bear fruit. Jesus picks upon these ideas in the Parable of the Sower. Jesus tells a parable of a sower sowing seeds on different types of ground. He talks about how seed is sown on the hard ground and is immediately snatched away, he talked about seed sown on the rocks which sprouts quick but withers and dies and he talked about seed sown in the thorns which gets choked out by sin and dies but then he goes on to say this:

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. (Matthew 13:23 ESV)

That is what we are seeing here in Psalm 1. We are seeing that the Road to life is characterized by having its roots planted firmly in good healthy soil. Those on the Road to life will endure because their roots are strong and healthy.

They will not wither

They will last

They will endure

And they will bear fruit

You see, brothers and sisters, if you want to live a life that bears fruit, if you want to glorify God with the way you live and if you want to endure to the end then you MUST PLANT YOURSELF so that you are ROOTED IN THE LIVING WATER of Jesus Christ. That is your foundation. That is the sure-fire way to ensure that you do not wither or fade.

Jesus tells us this himself in Matthew 7 that a life without Jesus is like a house built upon the sand and it will crumble and fall amidst the storms and trials of life, but a Life that is built upon a foundation of faith in Jesus Christ as our cornerstone will remain strong and will be able to withstand the difficulties in life.

Because rest assured there will be troubles and difficulties on the Road to life

but the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:22b ESV)

A tree cannot stand if it does not have healthy roots. A house will not stand with a faulty foundation and you cannot endure on the Road to life if your hope is not FIRMLY ANCHORED in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

But if it is. If you have put your faith in Jesus and lean on him, you WILL bear fruit and you will be able to joyfully declare with all the saints that Christ will hold you fast.

Finally, the Road to Life is characterized by:

4. Prosperity

Now before we carry on, I want to address the fact that this is a dangerous term for many of us. We hear the word prosperity and immediately our minds jump to the idea of the prosperity

gospel, the false teaching that Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead was done in order to give us health, wealth, and prosperity on Earth alone.

This is not what the gospel is about.

However, I want to redeem the word prosperity for us here this morning. I want to take it back from those who would misuse it and put in the proper Biblical framework.

Because as the ending of verse three clearly tells us:

In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:3b ESV)

We see this as well in Romans 8:28 where Paul says

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28 ESV)

So clearly there is a principle in Scripture that following the Road to life does bring about prosperity and blessing. However, as Pastor Paul helpfully says, it is a RESISTED and a DELAYED principle.

We live in the already but not yet. Christ has won the war on sin and death but there is still some bleeding and dying left to do on Earth. We are still opposed by the devil and still afflicted by the brokenness of the world until Christ comes again.

But that does not neglect the fact that we are still promised prosperity. Listen to what Jesus says to his disciples in Mark 10.

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."
(Mark 10:29-30 ESV)

Did you catch what Jesus said there. They will receive a hundredfold NOW, IN THIS TIME, and in the age to come. This passage from Mark shows us that there is both SACRIFICE and BLESSING for the Christian in this age. Not all of our blessings are deferred until Christ comes again.

The point of wisdom literature, and the point that Psalm 1 is making is that GENERALLY SPEAKING those who follow the path of righteousness should experience blessing and prosperity in this life. And the promise of scripture as a whole is that for those who have turned from their sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ, those who have chosen the narrow way Blessing and Prosperity is expected in this life AND GUARANTEED in the life to come.

For the Lord knows the ways of the Righteous, they WILL stand on Judgement day as the wicked Crumble and fall. Your blessing has been guaranteed in the blood of Jesus Christ and you can have peace in any and all situations knowing that nothing can separate you from the love of God.

So as we have seen, the Road to life is marked by intention separation from the world, a love for the law of God, fruitful endurance, and prosperity now and in the age to come. But, as the Psalmist points out, THE WICKED ARE NOT SO.

The Road to Death

The Road to Death lacks all these things. It is characterized in this passage in two ways.

First it is described by:

1. Instability

We see this in verse 4, look there with me.

The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away. (Psalm 1:4 ESV)

Now Farmers in those days would take all their grain to a flat surface, usually in a place exposed to the wind and they would beat and grind the grain in order to separate the good heads of grain from the chaff. Then they would use a pitchfork like tool to throw it all up into the air and the good grain would fall back down to the ground while the chaff would be blown away with the wind.

So, this paints a pretty clear picture of what will happen to all those who do not walk the Road to life.

This is more or less the entire point of the book of Ecclesiastes which is summarized in part in chapter 1 verse 14 which says

“I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.” (Ecclesiastes 1:14 ESV)

It is vanity, it is like trying to catch the wind. You CANNOT POSSIBLY HOLD ON TO IT.

That, my friends, is the Road to death.

And there is no stability on the road to death.

There is no stability in this World. Those on the Road to Death are completely devastated when things don't go their way. They are riddled with anxiety and paralyzing fear at the MERE THOUGHT of their chosen political leader not winning. Their ENTIRE IDENTITY is wrapped up in this world, in their career, their success, or their families. Which they cannot hold on to! There is no Lasting Peace on the road to death.

You can have all the money in the world, you can be healthy and rich and successful and have everything you could possibly want and IT MEANS NOTHING. For all of it will return to dust.

You cannot take it with you.

The Road to Life is concerned with storing up treasures in heaven which will last forever while the Road to Death is concerned with storing up treasures on earth “where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19)

It is defined by Instability.

IT is also defined by:

2. Insecurity

This is the ending of the Psalm and the clear warning for those who might take the Road to death. Look at verse 5 and 6 with me. They Read:

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1:5-6 ESV)

You see both those who walk the Road to life and those who walk the Road to Death will one day stand before the Lord in judgement. The difference between the two however, is that the path you choose determines the outcome of God's judgement.

IF you have walked the Road to life, you will hear those beautiful words

well done good and faithful servant. (Matthew 25:21 ESV)

But if you have walked the Road of death, you will be separated from the congregation of the righteous.

You will be set apart for destruction.

You will perish... for eternity.

And on one level or another we all know this. I quoted Augustine last week saying that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Romans 1:21-22 says

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." (Romans 1:21-23 ESV)

For although they knew God.

When we walk the path to destruction, when turn away from God, when we reject God, we will have no security in this life. We see this all over the world don't we. Everywhere we look we see a world full of people who are lacking hope, who do not have the assurance of faith. They do not have the security that comes through a relationship with Christ, so they look for it

elsewhere, in drugs alcohol, money, pleasure, whatever it may be. And when they can't find they become hopeless and disillusioned. The world is full of people searching for some degree of stability and security.

And that can only be found in Christ. It can only be found in knowing that the God who gave up his very own Son because of his great love and mercy towards us is on our side and nothing can get in the way of that.

But unless you are walking on the road to life, you will never know this.

If you have not put your faith in Christ this morning then all you will know is fear, judgement, and eternal death.

That is a heavy Truth to hear. It is a hard pill to swallow. It is an immensely sobering reality.

It is also however, the consistent teaching of Scripture. IF you choose to reject God and live for yourself you will face the fires of Hell.

End of Story.

But that leaves us with an important question this morning.

How can I get on the Road to Life?

How can I make sure that I will not face the punishment?

What Must I do to inherit eternal life?

Well my friends, the bad news is that none of us can walk the Road to Life on our own. Romans 3:23 tells us that

all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God (Romans 3:23 ESV)

Each and everyone of us has strayed off of the path.

But the good news is that God, in his amazing love and mercy sent his son for our salvation. Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. He is the only one who perfectly followed the Road to

life and at the end, having accomplished all the requirements of righteousness he humbly bowed and he took our place in judgement. He bore the full penalty for our sin upon the cross so that he might give us his righteousness. And Three days later he rose from the grave thereby conquering death and giving us hope and assurance that we too will rise to eternal life with him. And he ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of God until he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

This Jesus, he is your hope. He is the way for us to cross from the path of death and destruction to the path of life.

Jesus tells us in John 10:9 where he says

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. (John 10:9 ESV)

At the Entrance to the Narrow way, the entrance to the way to life lies a narrow door. We can enter the door by grace through faith in Jesus. We know that we can begin to follow the Road to life by Jesus Grace and we are carried along the road by his Grace.

Christ is the author, and he is the perfecter of our faith. Thanks be to God.

So, my friends the choice lies before you today you can choose to follow Jesus to life or choose to live for yourself towards death. And brothers and sisters let me just tell you. This choice... Choosing the path less traveled by, choosing the narrow way... will make all the difference.

Let's pray.