

Beloved,

It has been said that the Psalms are the mirror of the believer's soul. Every conceivable emotion and experience that we face in the church and our daily walk with God is covered in the Psalms, and what's more: we have the comfort of knowing that God raised a poet who would write about these feelings. Those feelings of just wanting to sing hallelujah to God when we look at the wonderful creation around us are in the inspired Psalms that sing of these feelings. When we grapple with our sins and our guilt and the horrible feelings that come when we know that we have rebelled against God, there are words in the Psalter that we may recite, knowing that the Holy Spirit has inspired someone to write about these things. If it is true that the Psalms are no less the inspired Word of God, then these psalms give us a God-given expression of the emotions that lie within us. If that is true, then it makes sense that we as the church have a special place in our worship services and our own lives for the Psalms as the revelation of God and ourselves and as the gift of God whereby we may in an obedient and God-glorifying way express ourselves to God. Finally, when we add that the Psalms are the songbook the Christ sang from, it should move us to sing from them as Christians. I think you get my point!

We confess and love the LORD God, who knows us to the very core of our beings. He has gathered the church into a congregation of the righteous through the saving work of Christ, even as He gathered Israel from Egypt so long ago to live as the assembly of the righteous in a pagan world. The LORD loves the righteous man, for He has made Him righteous, and He knows how the righteous man struggles in His sin. But He also knows that the righteous man has cause to hope. We look at Job. Was he righteous because he was without sin? Of course not, but he was righteous because God had laid His claim on him and gave Job faith, so Job clung to his righteousness we read in Job 27:6, and He could do so even in the wake of the trials and tribulations, and by the power of faith and of the Spirit he could sing, "I know that that my redeemer lives." (Job 19:25).

This God-given faith (Ephesians 2:8) and conviction separate the righteous man from the wicked, for the righteous know that his redeemer lives, for he has faith and assurance that all the promises of God contained in His Word are founded. The honest person knows that God's covenant with his people is the only context for singing the psalms. The promises and blessings and the law and rules for living that God lays forth in His covenant Word are the wellsprings of hope and the wellspring to real spiritual prosperity. The wicked do not and cannot know this

hope because they do not have this gift of faith, and thus, they cannot sing the Psalms as they are meant to be sung and, what's more, as they ought to be lived out in life. For the wicked to sing, some of the psalms would be to cry out to God for their destruction! (cf. Psalms 73; 139, and 140, for example)

We turn our attention this morning (afternoon/evening) to Psalm 1 stands as the gateway to the sanctuary of joy that is the book of Psalms. The 150 psalms as we have them are by God's providence there for us to sing in terms of being written and kept in time. Still, we confess that the Psalms are by God's work presented for us as a book, compiled with thought and purpose, and so more than just songs to sing or poetry to recite are the revelations of God to us. Psalm 1 sets out before us to sing the following 149 Psalms. It teaches us that before we can sing the songs, we must know what pleases the LORD God, the life, behaviour and attitude that He blesses, and the worldview He calls for. The Psalms, we posit, are very much songs of and are rooted in the covenant that God gave to Israel and has extended to us in Christ, for the psalms spring from the context of the covenant and are given to the children of the covenant. In Psalm 1, Israel then and the church today sings of the LORD our covenant God and the difference it makes to belong to God. The church today takes these words and sings of her experiences and convictions about living in and signing the promises of and her hope in the Lord to glorify God and point out to the world that there is no hope without God. God knows the hearts of man, both the righteous and the wicked man. We hear God's Word this morning under the theme, which is Psalm 1:6:

**The Lord Knows The Way of the Righteous, But The Way of the Ungodly Shall Perish.
1. A Portrait of the Righteous 2. A Portrait of the Rebel**

A Portrait of the Righteous The righteous man, we read in this Psalm, is like a tree planted by the waters that brings forth its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. What a marvellous picture this is. It is the picture of stability, a vital and fruitful life, growth, maturity and purpose. The vigorous tree is the picture of lastingness through time and stability in trouble. This healthy and living, and productive tree God reveals to us what a righteous person is like. They are stable as a tree. The picture is one of quietness and peacefulness the feeling that man creates when others see him is trusting his strength, which is God. That tree provides beauty for man, shade for creatures, protection for the birds and food for all in need. The tree is a creation of God for God to His glory and His enjoyment and so to the righteous child of God!

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Such a man lives out his life by the purpose that life was given and for which the person was created. That person is trustworthy bears the good fruit, but that in due season. We see his steadiness as something that causes us to trust such a man. This picture leads us to think of the type of men we would have to lead the church or be good sons, friends or fathers and husbands. The picture gives us a notion of the type of women we would have to love, teach, and serve the Lord in the church. Such an image leads us to hope for such women in the church who bring an unswerving faith. This is the type of human being created in the image of God we should all aspire to be. Bringing forth fruit when needed, the righteous are not constrained to certain days or months in due time. Such is neither Jew nor Gentile but free to blossom and always produce the fruit of righteousness. Such lives in loving and serving glorifying relationship with God. Such a man walks by the law—and by law, we ought to understand the Torah in terms of law and stories and revelation, but the inspired psalmist no less thinks of the psalms as revelation and guidance. When we walk with the Lord by the light of His Word, and we trust and obey the promise is sure: that man is blessed.

We are reminded of the words of Jesus as recorded by John as we have them in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing." There we can put together ourselves who live in the administration of the New Covenant. We must produce good works, and we can produce good works if we abide in Jesus. He is our living water, and by the Spirit, that water of life is transformed from mere sustaining water to producing water. That water is changed, bringing change in us so that we in faith can live in Christ, who is that man who is blessed, obedient and the tree of prosperity. In Him, we live and grow and produce fruit for the glory of God and to reveal His righteousness here on earth! That, of course, leads to blessings and hope!

Verse 1 tells us how blessed such a man is. We could also read that to mean how happy such a man is. And further, we sing; instead, we exclaim, ***O, how happy is such a man!*** Where the sign "blessed" is placed in front of the house, we can expect to find a godly man within. Such a man lives in joy. Such a man lives in peace. There is no anxiety about him, for God takes care of such a man. He nourishes him by the springs of living water; He will bring such a man to maturity and fullness.

This man is like a tree planted by the river. It may bend some when the wind comes, but it will not break. So is the man of righteousness. Verse 1 tells us what the righteous and wise

man does not do. He does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. That is the poet's way of saying that he does not think the way the rebels do. He is not affected by all the ideas and the way of life of the ungodly, so he does not travel with them. He does not stand in the path of sinners; that is to say, in his morality and the way he conducts himself, he is not like the sinner whose lifestyle and activity prove that they hate God and lead to eternal hell. Standing means he has now ceased travelling with them and has become one of the wicked and has embraced their way of life. Finally, such a man does not sit in the mocker's seat; he does not associate with those who hate God and would make fun of the great covenant God. He does not sit, meaning that he is now comfortable with them and associates or identifies himself with the wicked. The man of wisdom knows what Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart there is no God, he is corrupt, and he does abominable works." The righteous man knows and sings those psalms that ask, "How does God know?" "Is there knowledge in the highest?" (Ps73:10-11) and "When I went into the sanctuary of God, then I understood their end" (Psalm 73:17)

The man of righteousness is not impressed with unrighteousness or the unrighteous. We also need to consider here that Psalm 1 reveals to us the wicked who, in the covenant community as opposed to those, no less evil is from the outside. The godly man does not walk with the covenant breakers, and he does not seek joy and a way of life and reason for being from the rebel. He does not say of the wicked, *Well, you know they are friendly people too; we ought not to be so judgmental, and I will show what a bright and open kind of person I can be, so I think I'll go and see and what they have to say and how they live.* See, that is where the walking starts, and if we do not get off that road, we will soon be sitting down with them laughing at all those pious folk—who we will laugh at and mock as thinking they are so much better than we are. So the Devil works, and we cannot stand on our own for even a minute fall.

No, the righteous person is steadfast and stable. Such a one is dependable. And such a one has lastingness, the leaf never withers, life courses through his veins. But how can this be so?

There is another facet to this portrait. The tree is planted by waters, and those waters bring life and drink to the tree. That tree is continuously fed. But what gives the man of righteousness this stability and life nourishment? What is this River?

Verse 2 tells us that the delight of the blessed man, the man who does not walk, stand or sit with a rebel, takes pleasure in the law of God. He meditates on it; he mutters quietly; he

turns it repeatedly in his mind. He seeks the thinking of God, he seeks the morality of God, and he seeks the fellowship of God. He finds the way of the Lord, for it is the way of the righteous that the Lord knows. He finds that in God's law. That law or the teaching is from the Lord. Lord, there is God's covenant name. That teaching, that law of God, tells the man of God how to live before God and how to come to God.

But don't we learn our sin and misery from the law? Doesn't the law teach us how miserable we are? Isn't the law that which pulls us down? Why would meditating on it give us joy and delight? Recall that we have said Psalm 1 is teaching us that law is the whole Word of God, and as such, that Word gives us life. Remember what Jesus meant when tempted by the Devil in the wilderness—when the Devil asked that righteous man, the Son of God, to walk with him? "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" God's Word brings life, hope, and water that produces fruit. We read it to turn it over in our minds and live it out all the time, producing fruit and being consistent because we are blessed, and we know it!

God's law, we are sure, always contains the promise of Jesus. Jesus, after His resurrection, walked with two men, as Luke tells us on the road to Emmaus. These two men were utterly confused about what had happened and that Jesus, who they thought was the Messiah, had died, and this could not be the Messiah. They had lost faith and disconnected from the water of life. They produced the dried fruits of doubt and foolishness. Jesus taught them, saying, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-27)

The faithful to the covenant Israelite was like that tree whose leaf never withers because his hope is in God's promise, which never fails. That promise was Christ, and so they hoped in Christ. We have Christ now. He is the water of life, and in Him, we bear fruit, and we long for His appearing, so we have new hope and blessedness in Christ. We now know that Jesus came to free us from the way of ungodly that we would be turned onto the path that leads to God. He died as if He was the ungodly for the godly, suffering on the tree of the cross and yet the tree of life and the water of life, so we love Him and love God and have them both we are of all people blessed! In that law, in that Word, the Holy Spirit works in us, testifying that Jesus

saves, testifying that I know my redeemer lives, proving that Christ is the living water that we will never thirst when we drink from him.

As we look at the portrait, we see the man of righteousness as God would have us see him. Do you see him? We cannot help but notice if we are looking in the right places, two such men. One was created from the dust of the ground by the will of God, who made such a man and his wife from him in the image of God. Then we read in Ephesians 4:24 that the image is ***true righteousness and holiness***. The catechism adds to us the reason for this image- that we might rightly know God. And being the blessed or the happy man Adam forsook all that he had and walked in the way of the ungodly- that is the epitome of the ungodly-Adam walked in the way of the foolish, the sinner, and that mocker: hand in hand with Satan! That is the tragic reality of life without God and His Word.

But you are looking forward from Eden, and you see another bright light, a tall, healthy tree, a tree growing as a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and you see Jesus Christ. He is the covenant child who became the covenant man who died as the covenant curse. Yet by His fruit, we knew Him. And now He says to us in John 15 that if we abide in Him, we will bear fruit that the Father will be pleased.

The law teaches us that a man is righteous by faith. Genesis teaches us about Abraham in Genesis 17 that it was accounted to him as righteousness we read of the blameless and upright Abraham. Not what Abraham's hands had done but a looking forward to what Christ would do and faith expressed! Abraham is the man of faith, the man of the Spirit, and the tree planted by the living waters despite his sin, his lack of faith and weakness. By faith, he still stood even to the point of offering Isaac to the LORD when it all seemed so confusing: love in submission, and then the blessing came and in time, that childless older man became the father of many nations and by his son blessing came to the whole world! Now Christ sends His Spirit into all the sheep He gathers by that Word and Spirit. And then a renewing happens, and we begin to see just a little more of that covenant man in ourselves and each other!

We then not only sing about becoming but ought to become the people of stability and peace. We must be people who meditate upon the word day and night, not out of duty, not even to save ourselves, but because it is our delight. We have been liberated from the darkness and have been enlightened! How can we sing the Psalms if we are not redeemed and born again? Of course, in ourselves, we fall short. But as we meditate on God's law, we find Jesus. He

will forgive us. As we meditate on God's law, we see the greatness of our God; the Holy Spirit testifies to these things. We read in Galatians 5 of the fruits of the Spirit. In Christ, we must become, and we have become the children of light walking in all goodness, righteousness, and truth (Ephesians 5:8-9). But seeing our God, who is the perfection of the covenant way of justice and who sent His Son to fulfill all righteousness and love, motivates us to be the righteous man. We must hold onto that righteousness that our singing these beautiful Psalms of the church isn't meaningless. If we are like that tree, our leaves will never wither, we will mature and bear fruit, and we will be the people God wants us to be. Not so, however, the wicked.

Portrait of the Rebel The portrait of the rebel compared to the good man is not so lovely. The Psalmist begins by saying, "But not so, not so the wicked." In terms of the inspired poetry: he, the wicked man, is not like a tree planted by the water. He does not meditate upon the Word of the Lord; he does not prosper in everything he does. In fact, he does not prosper in anything he does. Instead, he is like the chaff: the lifeless remains from a once vibrant but now harvested stalk, characterless, when the wind comes, blown away. When we speak of being "blown away," we are not speaking of the fierce storms of life, but instead, the pure breezes of lust and desire are enough to scatter the wicked so that they are no more.

Do you see the picture of the rebel? What is going through your mind now? See, the wicked would listen and laugh and either in hate insult us or, in his cynicism, move on. Whatever—time to eat and drink and live and let live. He is not blessed, but he does not want a blessing either. That is curious for us, or it ought to be if we are righteous. But sometimes, if we are honest about it, they look to be having all the fun and blessing! He has his counsel, his way and his seat, and these are not God's counsel, God's way or God's seat. He is free, I suppose, free to live the way he wants, which is ironically the living death. Ah, so perverse is the rebel that righteous man becomes perverse to him. So perverse is the rebel that God is perverse to him, truth is perverse to him, and the truth is a lie. The God of holiness is mocked and ridiculed in grand displays of celebration, art, architecture, great dominions, luxury, money, and so-called bravery. Still, when the winds of life blow, they fly away and in the end, they wither away and die. Their presence here is all that is soon gone and then to the flames. Jesus also said when speaking about being the vine and we the branches and bearing fruit: "If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned." (John 15:6)

See philosophers; wisdom means being able to distinguish. To distinguish well, we must see it as God reveals the distinctions. What a difference there in Psalm 1! There is nothing the same about the end of the righteous man and the rebel—the upright like a tree; the wicked like chaff. The tree in which life is surging, maturing and bearing fruit is compared to that which is dead and is soon gone and forgotten. This is the song we sing before God and to each other and the world. We sing this in our quiet meditations during the day. We sing it to understand what all happened in the past year: the wars, the economic fallout and the politics. We look and read, and now we can understand just a bit of the failure of politicians and the lack of justice and the growing evil around us. We can understand the increasing irrelevancy of the church because so many in the church or the churches themselves are trying to be relevant, walking in the counsel of the wicked and standing in the path and sitting down with the rebels. This is the song that ancient Israel sang, that the New Testament church sang and that we sing today!

When a covenant child breaks the covenant, he is no longer like a tree but is wicked, and the wicked are like chaff. O, how the church in the world needs to hear this, sing this and be convicted of it. Too many new hymns are not written about these truths—let us hope that we will continue to sing the songs of Christ. Even in the church, how many people do not wander about seeking something, asking for answers rebelling against God, refusing to heed his Word, which becomes fools and says that there is no God? The prophet Jeremiah speaking to an apostate Israel, drew her attention to this Psalm. He told Israel that the wicked are like a shrub in the desert that does not see right, but the righteous man is like a tree planted by the waters. The evil that lives in the covenant community shrivel and dry up as if they were like those who live in wicked rebellion outside of the covenant (Jeremiah 17). Believing this, we use the keys of the Kingdom to call the world to repentance, the baptized children to repentance and the key of discipline to disciple in love and hope for the rebellious with the Word of God.

The wicked will not stand in the judgment. When God and His glory appear, they will flee. There is no strength in them, for they have rejected the wellspring of faith. There is no hope for them, for they stand as covenant breakers as spiritual rebels. They stand as hopeless. They cannot and will not stand in the congregation of the Holy. They will not stand in the church of Jesus Christ. They cannot sing the Psalms of praise to God. And, of course, there will come a day when they will not stand with the righteous man; when Christ comes again, the charges against them will demand that they are cast from God's presence forever.

We then are left with words from John's Gospel: 3:17: "For whosoever believes shall have eternal life but to he who does not believe is condemned already." That is a summary statement of the covenant. Psalm 1 is simply the covenant put into inspired verse, and it provides the theme of all the subsequent Psalms

Conclusion: What are we to make of all this? God says that He knows the way of the righteous. That means He is intimate with the way of the righteous and with the righteous themselves. The way of the righteous is how God has provided for living. The covenantal blessing is issued: "Fear the Lord and live, fear the Lord and prosper." But to the curse is sung: "The way of the ungodly will perish." Joshua giving his final words, challenged Israel in this way,

"Now, therefore, serve the Lord in sincerity and truth and put away the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourself this day whom you will serve..."

Whom will you serve? See the portrait of the righteous and the wicked. Sing of the covenant of God. Yes, sing of the covenant of God! Sing of God Himself: "For we are His people, the sheep of His pasture..." We are the assembly of the righteous, and we are the light of the world, and in this world, the faithful are known by Him and are called: blessed! Amen