

Summer Psalms

*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.
(Psalms 1:1–2 ESV)*

*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.
(Psalms 29:2 ESV)*

Two Ways

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Psalm 1

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Psalm 1; that's on page 448 in your pew Bibles. We are starting something new this morning; we are starting a summer journey through the Psalms. Now, obviously we won't get through all 150 Psalms over the course of the summer but what we hope to do is make this book of the Bible a little more accessible to you as a Christian. The Psalms used to be the most familiar part of the Bible. For a thousand years of Christian history the average believer was likely to possess only 1 book of the Bible – the Book of Psalms. It was the prayer book and the hymn book of the church! The Book of Psalms has been called “The Bible In Miniature” – more than any other single book of the Bible it reflects upon the plotline of the whole. (Using the 5 G outline) It reflects upon who God is as Creator and Redeemer and Sustainer; it reflects on who we are as fallen sinners and it laments our sinful inability to walk in the ways of righteousness and peace. It anticipates the coming and the ministry of Messiah. It leads us in grateful worship and response and it paints for us a picture of the beauty and the glory of the life that is to come – it is THE BIBLE and THE GOSPEL in miniature!

Psalm 1 – the Psalm we will look at this morning, has generally been understood as an introduction to the Book of Psalms. In a sense it is the Psalms in miniature and like the Old Testament as a whole it presents a picture of two possible roads; a road to life and blessing and a

road to death and cursing. These are only two options according to the Bible. Way back in Deuteronomy God said:

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)

That's the call of God in the Bible and that's the call of God in Psalm 1. We'll read it together, and by God's grace, respond to it as we should. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

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.

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

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

Let's talk first then about the way of life.

The Way Of Life

According to this Psalm the way of life is characterized first of all by:

1. **Intentional separation**

The Psalmist begins with a negative description; the person on this path:

walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers (Psalms 1:1 ESV)

All of those verbs are in the perfect tense meaning they reflect a settled attitude or habit. The blessed man – the person who is walking on the way of life – is not in the habit of listening to the wisdom of the world. They don't take counsel with the wicked, they don't behave in the pattern of the culture – they don't settle into the skepticism and mockery of the masses. They are walking on altogether different path.

The Bible is very clear on this point. If you want to hear the truth – then you have to shut out the noise of culture. Think of how often Jesus went away from the crowds, away from the city in order to get alone with God:

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone (Matthew 14:23 ESV)

The point here seems very obvious – Jesus is modeling for us an intentional turning away from one voice in order to tune in another. If HE HAD TO DOD THAT then WE NEED TO DO THAT!

To walk in the ways of God there has to be a clean break with the ways of the world. The Apostle Paul says the same thing:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14 ESV)

The paths of life and death do not run parallel! If you try and hold hands with the world while you walk with Christ it will literally TEAR YOU APART! James said the same thing:

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4 ESV)

You have to choose! You have to decide who you are going to listen to and who you are going to walk with. The call into the kingdom is always a call OUT OF THE WORLD.

Secondly, the way of life according to this Psalm is characterized by:

2. Delight in the law of the Lord

Verse 2 says that far from being interested in the wisdom and ways of the world:

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

There are a couple of key words in that verse, the first one is probably the word “delight”. God desires far more than begrudging obedience. If God wanted mere obedience then he would have

contented himself with birds and squirrels. Birds and squirrels act according to their nature and calling – they do what God created them to do – but humans are different. We were created with the ability to OBEY or not to OBEY. To love or not to love. And make no mistake, according to God, the two are one and the same. Jesus said:

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

Love is obedience – obedience is love and God blesses now and forever the person who obeys because he loves. And Psalm 1 says that the blessed man – the person that God blesses - delights in the law of God. William Plumer says this:

“A good man loves the Decalogue because it is the transcript of God’s moral character.”¹

Isn’t that interesting? You see, you can’t say that you love God and not love God’s law. God’s law is God’s character applied to human life, so to not love the law is to not love God. The blessed man – the SAVED MAN – the real Christian – the person walking the path of life - **LOVES THE LAW OF GOD BECAUSE HE LOVES GOD!** He wants to know more of the law so that he can live more closely aligned with it. That takes us to the second key word in that verse; the word “meditate”.

To Hebrew word translated as “meditate” refers to “the act of thoughtful deliberation with the implication of speaking to oneself.”² Jews normally read the Bible audibly – out loud – so this word means to read the Bible to yourself and to talk to it – to talk to God. To say – “what does that mean?” “God open my eyes to understand. Holy Spirit, soften my heart to desire this. Lead me in the right path”. The blessed man – or the blessed woman – speaks to God with her Bible open. She wants to know God and she seeks him in the Scriptures. And this is the important part – she bows before what she sees. This is the one, in the end, who is blessed by God. Isaiah 66:2 says

this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

¹ William S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust, first printed 1867, reprinted 2016), 28.

² KM Hebrew Dictionary, Accordance version, H2047.

God blesses, now and forever the one who loves his law and meditates on his Word.

Thirdly, the way of life according to this Psalm is characterized by:

3. Fruitfulness and endurance

Look at verse 3:

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

The word translated by the ESV as “planted” actually means “transplanted”. It is the same word used in Psalm 92 where it clearly refers to trees taken from one place and planted or transplanted in another:

¹²The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. ¹³They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. ¹⁴They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green
(Psalms 92:12–14 ESV)

God PLANTS US on the way of life – we weren’t born here, we were put here and if we were put here by God then we will last. This is the Old Testament version of the Golden Chain. The Golden Chain is found in Romans 8. There Paul says:

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:30 ESV)

Paul says that everyone God SAVES makes it to then end! God doesn’t lose people at any stage of the process. If he knew you from before the foundation of the world then he will call you. His call will be effective. You will answer it. He will justify you – that is he will save you. And if he saves you then he will never lose you. He will bring you all the way home. This is what was promised by the prophets.

And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. (Isaiah 35:8 ESV)

As a fool I find that very encouraging. I will finish this race, not because I am stronger than the

temptations of the devil and not because I am wiser than the world – I will make it to the end because God will hold me fast. He will not let me stray or stumble. What God plants flourishes FOREVER.

Fourthly and lastly in terms of the way of life, according to Psalm 1 it is characterized by:

4. Prosperity and vindication

Verse 3 concludes by saying:

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

Now in previous generations we would probably not need to say as much about that as need to say today. Because of the errors of the Prosperity Gospel we need to be careful to read this verse in harmony with some of the other things that the Bible says – we need to hear it in harmony with some of the other things the Psalmist say. In Psalm 93 for example we read this:

³ O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? ... They kill the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless;⁷ and they say, “The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive.” (Psalms 94:3–7 ESV)

Jeremiah has a similar question, he says:

Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? (Jeremiah 12:1 ESV)

Why isn't Psalm 1 working the way it is supposed to? That's what they are asking and we need to ask that. Reading Psalm 1 to the very end provides some helpful insight. Right after saying that the righteous will prosper the Psalmist goes on to speak about the existence and short lived prosperity of the wicked. But it doesn't last, he says – it doesn't stand the final judgment. In the end only the righteous are accepted by the Lord. Verse 6 says:

the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalms 1:6 ESV)

The Hebrew word “knows” means more than just “knows”. It means to approve, it means to vindicate, it means to accept. Jesus uses it in just that way in Matthew 7:

And then will I declare to them, 'I never **knew** you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Matthew 7:23 ESV)

Jesus 'knew' them – it was not that he wasn't acquainted with them it was that he did not approve of them. They were not his people, they were not walking in his way and therefore he did not own them at the end. Their prosperity was short lived. Their end was death and ruin. The prosperity of the righteous endures forever.

So we don't want to read this verse the way the Prosperity Gospel people are reading it but neither do we want to over react and under appreciate what it is in fact saying. Make no mistake there is an immediate, temporal blessing associated with walking in the way of life. Jesus spoke about that too. He said:

²⁹ 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)

According to the Bible – it is BOTH/AND. There is a principle of general prosperity associated with the way of life. However, it is a RESISTED PRINCIPLE. It is a PRINCIPLE WITH AN ENEMY. There is no doubt – no intelligent observer of history would deny – that every culture that has embraced Christianity has experienced a tremendous LIFT in terms of health, well being, justice, equity and PROSPERITY. Name me a country you would want to live in that has not at some point been under the Gospel of Jesus Christ? There is a principle of general prosperity within the Gospel – there is a blessing to be had for even imperfect obedience in this life. God's ways WORK – that cannot be denied, but it can be resisted and it can be delayed. But not forever; look at what happens at the final judgment:

⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matthew 13:41–43 ESV)

In the end – at the final judgment – everything that resists and opposes the righteous will be fully and finally removed. **Then** the righteous will shine like the stars in the heaven. **Then** they will be all that they were made to be and they will have all that the Father has promised to give them. **Then** they will be prosperous and that prosperity will never tarnish, rust or fade.

That is the final destiny and the eternal state for all those who walk, faithfully in the way of life. But the wicked are not so. The Psalmist tells us also about the way of death.

The Way Of Death

He describes it first of all as being the opposite of the way of life therefore everything he said about the way of life can be turned on its head. The wicked do not reject the wisdom of culture – they sink into it and absorb it warp and woof. The wicked do not love the law of God – they hate it, they argue with it, they change it or they ignore it. In addition to all of what is implied in the contrast the Psalmist goes on to emphasize two things in particular. He says that the way of the wicked – the way of death - is characterized first of all by:

1. Impermanence

Look at verse 4:

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

That's an agricultural image but the meaning is very obvious. Farmers in those days would take all their grain up on to a hill so that the wind could pass over it. They would take an ox and grind out the grain to separate the wheat kernels from the crackly bits that had no food value. Then they would take a fork and pitch the stuff up into the air so that the wind could blow it away. It was useless and it was separated out from that which the farmer wanted to keep.

Jesus made this same point by means of a slightly different agricultural metaphor. He said:

“Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up (Matthew 15:12–13 ESV)

The wicked are like weeds. They do spring up quick and they do seem to prosper for a short time. But when the Master comes they will be rooted up and they will be thrown out. The way of the wicked does not last.

Secondly the Psalmist emphasizes the essential insecurity of the wicked.

2. Insecurity

Psalm 1 concludes with these words:

For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.
(Psalms 1:6 ESV)

The way of the wicked is like a highway that comes to an abrupt end. It has no future – when it comes to the final judgment it comes to a crashing halt. The Lord doesn't KNOW THEM and therefore there is no hope for these people, there is no future! Jesus said the exact same thing. He said that the final judgment will be like a wedding banquet that a king gave for his son. It will be a time of rich blessings and great joy for all those who are known to the Master. But the story ends with the King seeing a person who had no right to be there.

¹¹“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹²And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (Matthew 22:11–13 ESV)

The man had no standing – he was not prepared to meet the Master. That fate waiting for everyone who is walking on this path. One day the road will end and they will meet the master and they will not be prepared and they will be cast out into outer darkness.

The way of wicked is a dangerous way. It does not last – it is not wise and it is not safe. It ends, ultimately in death and ruin.

Psalm 1 therefore is both a warning and an invitation. It encourages us to respond by considering what path we're walking on. You are supposed to read this Psalm and wonder whether you are walking on the path of life or the path of death. Just like a couple of weeks ago when the Apostle Paul told his people:

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. (2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV)

If this is true then its super important to know what road you are travelling and if you are walking on the path of death then you need to ask the question:

How Can I Get On The Path Of Life?

After all the story of the Old Testament is basically how nobody ever walked this way perfectly. They couldn't hold this road because of the brokenness of their own hearts. Even David couldn't hold this road. He saw it – he could sing about it – but he couldn't walk it! By the end of his life David is a rapist, a murderer and his son wants to kill him – he is not living a particularly blessed life! So how can we hope to walk this way and how can we hope to ever possess all the blessings and promises of God? The answer appears to come to us in Psalm 2.

The Jewish community has long understood that Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 go together somehow and so do most Christian commentators. J. Alec Motyer for example in his devotional translation asks the question:

Have you noticed that Psalm 2 ends where Psalm 1 begins, with blessing pronounced on the individual described in 1:1, and on all those described in 2:12? This has the effect of bracketing the two Psalms together.³

The answer, according to Motyer is found in Psalm 2, verse 12 in particular. Psalm 2 talks about a king who is also called SON OF GOD in verse; he will come and he will be strong and he will be wise and he will be merciful. The Psalmist ends Psalm 2 by saying:

Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalms 2:12 ESV)

Are you seeing that? There is an INDIVIDUAL who is blessed that we can take refuge in and ALSO be blessed. Now, who do you think that is? Its Jesus. Martin Luther says about Psalm 1:

“The first Psalm speaks about Christ – literally – thus: *Blessed is the man*. He is the only Blessed One and the only Man from whose fullness they have all received that they might be blessed”⁴

Jesus is the only Man – the God-Man – who ever lived this life perfectly and who thereby secured for us all the blessings of God. God designed the world to receive the blessings of

³ J. Alec Motyer, *Psalms By The Day* (Geanies House: Christian Focus, 2016), 14.

⁴ Martin Luther as cited in *Reformation Commentary On Scripture, Old Testament VII* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 9.

heaven through loving obedience. However as the Bible says, human beings decided to seek their blessings along another road. That was a bad choice – that road leads to death and ruin. But thanks be to God for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! He came and did for us what we did not do for ourselves. He walked this road to the end. He separated himself and dedicated himself to God. He delighted in God’s Word – he meditated on God’s Word day and night. He was obedient, he was successful, he was faithful – he DID IT ALL. Therefore the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians:

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. (2 Corinthians 1:20 ESV)

Because of Christ – all the blessings and all the promises of God BELONG TO US! He does it for us – and then also he does it through us. He teaches us to walk this way. He gives us a new heart – a heart that desires the Word of God. He puts his Spirit within us that says:

“This is the way, walk in it,” (Isaiah 30:21 ESV)

It is only through faith in Jesus Christ that we can walk this way! He takes away our sin, he covers us in the robe of his righteousness, he changes our heart, he gives us the Spirit and he brings us all the way home. Blessed IS THIS MAN! And blessed are all those who take refuge in him. This is the Bible in miniature – this is the Gospel! And this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let’s pray together.