

The Key to Happiness

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Our Scripture reading today is from the first Psalm, Psalm one. And I am going to read the whole psalm.

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; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 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.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. 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.¹

What is it that leads to happiness? What makes people happy?

You know if I walk around the world and just ask people that question I would get innumerable different answers. There are some people would say, "Well, you know, if I had a million dollars I would be happy." Did you ever hear people say that?

Well, you know something. I have met people who have a million dollars and are not happy. I have met extremely wealthy people whose wealth has not brought them happiness. Now they have everything they could want in the world, but they are not happy.

And I have had occasion to meet some of the poorest people in the world, people who struggle day by day just to make sure that the bills are paid and there is food on the table, have difficulty managing all the financial aspects of their lives and yet they are among the happiest people I have ever met.

So money does not necessarily bring happiness.

What then is it that will make a person happy?

¹ Psalm 1:1-6

Well, some people will say that it is prestige and honor. It is being on the top of the heap as they would say, being number one. And certainly there is nothing wrong with achieving your goals in life. There is certainly nothing wrong with reaching the pinnacle in whatever your profession is. But I have met some people who are at the top of their profession, but very sad in their lives. In fact, I knew of one man who was not only extremely wealthy, but he was absolutely the highest person in his organization who became so depressed that he wound up committing suicide. Position, wealth, do not necessarily bring happiness.

God in the first Psalm tells us the key and the secret to real happiness. The psalm begins, “Blessed is the man.”² In Hebrew, אֲשֶׁר־יֵשׁ (ash-ray` ha-ish`) And the word אֲשֶׁר־יֵשׁ (ash-ray`) in the original language, in Hebrew, has the idea of happiness. So, in other words, he is saying, “Here is the key to happiness, folks. I am going to tell you. This is how to be happy.”

“Happy is the man...”

Another interesting thing about this, if we are going to translate it as accurately as we possibly can, the word אֲשֶׁר־יֵשׁ (ash-ray`) is plural. The idea is it is talking about the happinesses, all of the things that make a person happy. And it is in what we call in Hebrew the construct state which means it is possessive.

Let me translate it then with those things in mind. “Oh, the happinesses of the man...oh, the things that make the man happy.”

Well, as we read this we are expecting, I’m sure to...that God is going to begin with some very positive advice about, you know, things to do to make yourself happy. The interesting thing is that he doesn’t start with the positives. But he starts with the negatives. And, you know, that seems strange in our world because we are taught today that we shouldn’t focus on negative things. We should focus on positive things. “Oh, stay away from those prohibitions. Stay away from all those negatives that we used to hear in our childhood. But think of only the good and the positive things.”

Well, God starts out with the negatives. And he mentions three things in particular. And as we read them we see them, I believe, as a spiral downhill leading to greater and greater unhappiness in life. He is saying, “Blessed is the man who does not do these things.”

So, on other words, if you do these things you are going to be unhappy.

Now here is the picture. “Happy is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.”³

The first thing that we see in terms of this downward spiral is the action of the individual.

² Psalm 1:1

³ See Psalm 1:1

Take a look at it for a moment. First of all, it is the person who walks. If you think about it for a moment, when you are walking it is relatively easy to change direction, isn't it? I mean, if I am walking here I can easily turn to the left. I can turn to the right. I can go in any direction that I want. It is a lot harder to change direction when you are standing still.

As an example, I remember those days—and many of you young people don't—when the cars did not have automatic steering or power steering. Do you remember those days, some of you who are my age or, you know, even some who are younger? And can you remember how difficult it was to turn the wheel when you were standing still? I mean, you would just kill yourself to turn that wheel. But let the car move even the slightest bit and the wheel turns much more easily.

God says, first of all, the first thing we can do wrong is to walk in the wrong place. But once we start walking in the wrong place, we wind up, he says, standing where we ought not to be. Once you are standing still, it is much more difficult, as we said, for you to move. But you can still move. You can still get out of the way.

The final step is, “nor sit in the seat of scoffers.”⁴ Oh, once you are sitting there, once you are stabilized in the place where you ought not to be it is so difficult to move.

Well, that is the first picture of this downward spiral. The second picture that God gives us here is the relationship that we have towards other people. He says, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel...”⁵ Counsel is just advice.

It is important that we carefully determine where we are going to get our advice and our help. One of the problems that we have in our society today is a lot of people—Christians and non Christians alike—think that they can get valid advice from people who don't know the Lord.

One of the wonderful experiences that I have in live is the opportunity to seek out people who know the Lord Jesus as those who will give me advice in every area. One of the joys that I have is seeing doctors who know the Lord Jesus Christ who can not only talk about health, but talk about health from the vantage point of the gospel of salvation.

One time we had the experience of going to a lawyer for a relatively minor issue that we were dealing with and by God's grace we wound up with a Christian lawyer, one who loved the Lord with all his heart. We were sitting there. We concluded our business. We signed the papers that we needed. And he looked at us and he said, “Now that we are finished, would you mind if I had a word of prayer for you?”

Did you ever have a lawyer who said, “Let me pray for you now that we are finished the business?”

⁴ Psalm 1:1

⁵ Ibid.

Isn't that wonderful? I wanted to receive advice from this man. I go back to him any time because he not only was concerned about the legal technicalities of what we were doing, but he cared about us as people and cared about us through his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

From whom we receive our counsel, that is so very, very important.

But listen. Here is the downward spiral. "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel..."⁶ That is just listening to advice. The next step down is, "Nor stands in the way or the path of sinners."⁷ It is one thing to listen to someone's advice that may not honor God, but the next step is even worse when you start walking in the path or the way of those who don't know God.

And then, finally, "Nor sits in the seat of scoffers."⁸ First you listen to the advice. Second, you begin to walk in the way that is inappropriate. And, finally, you are sitting where you don't belong, at the feet of scoffers.

The third picture of this downward spiral that God gives us is the individuals with whom we relate. And his advice is to with whom we should not relate or have an association. It begins. "Happy is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked."⁹ This word "wicked" in the original language really does not mean someone who is morally wicked. The idea is just someone who does not know God.

So we start out getting our advice from people who don't know God. Well, what is the next step? If this is the way we focus our life, it says, "Nor stands in the way of sinner."¹⁰ That word "sinner" is a good translation, one who openly sins against God.

You start dealing with people who don't know God as your closest relationships and you will find yourself associating with those who openly sin against the things of God.

And then, finally, "Nor sit in the seat of scoffers."¹¹ A scoffer is one who openly talks against God and the things of God.

Well, what a picture of a downward spiral? God says, "You want a happy life? You want to be happy? Don't start on the wrong path." If you begin by listening to the counsel or walking in the counsel of those who don't know God, the time will come that you will be standing in the path of sinners, those who speak against...those who sin against God. And eventually you will be settled sitting in the seat of those who openly scoff and speak against the things of God.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

God says, “You want to be happy?” Here are a few things that you are not supposed to do.

Well, before we start getting depressed about all these negatives, God then goes on to the positives. It is not only things we are not to do that will make us happy, but what are we supposed to do to be happy? What will give us a happy life?

Well, he explains to us here. He says, “But,” looking at the second verse, “But his delight is in the law of the Lord.”¹² Now, first of all we need to look at that word “law.” The word “law” is in Hebrew the word תורה (to-law’) which has many different meanings in the Scripture. It can mean just the five books of Moses. It is often used that way. Sometimes it has the idea of the entirety of God’s revelation in the Bible. And I believe that that is the idea that it has here.

It says, “But his delight is in the law of the Lord.”¹³ The word “delight” has the idea of that which gets you excited, that which thrills your heart. Now, think about this for a moment. What gets you all excited? I mean there are certain things that should excite you. Well, for instance, I love my wife very much. When I see her I get excited. I mean she is my sweetheart and our relationship excites me. That’s a good thing.

Sometimes we get excited about the wrong things and things that will dishonor God will be so much a part of a life that...that we can wind up focusing on them and getting excited about them instead of the things of God. God says, “If you want to really be happy, your delight, that which excites you, should be the law of the Lord.” The Word of God should be the cause of excitement for God’s people.

And he goes on to describe how we are to be excited about it.

He says, “And on his law he meditates day and night.”¹⁴

The word “meditate” in the original language comes from a root that has the idea of mumbling. Did you ever mumble things? I do. I do sometimes. Do you ever...things are important to you, you just relax in your thinking and all of the sudden you hearself saying something, you don’t even know why you are saying it, but it comes out of your mouth? You know, and it is something that you are thinking about that is important in your life. Maybe you mumble the name of your spouse or your children or something like that, things that are important in your life.

God says we ought to get to the point where we are mumbling God’s Word. It is so much a part of us that it is normal for it to come to mind as difficulties and problems come up in our lives.

¹² Psalm 1:2

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

There is only one way to reach that point in our lives and that is to consistently read and study the Word of God.

You know, I had one person ask me one time, he said, “What are the steps in effective Bible study, in getting to know the Bible?”

And I said there are three steps. And I have told you this before. Three basic steps in getting to know the Bible. Step number one is read the Bible. Step number two is read the Bible. I bet you you can guess what step number three is. Step number three is read the Bible.

If you want it to become a part of your life, you have to immerse yourself in it. You have to make it so much a part of you that you are reading it every day and that passages of Scripture just pop into your mind.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if when a problem comes into your life, the first thing you think of is a passage of God's Word that gives you the way of dealing with that problem. And every single problem can be dealt with with Scripture, with the Word of God. We need to understand what God's Word is.

Oh, my friends, this is the key to happiness, staying away from the ungodly and the wicked, not getting enmeshed in that type of lifestyle, but instead becoming involved in knowing, loving, understanding, memorizing and mumbling the Word of God, that it becomes a vital part of our lives.

The passage goes on to describe this happy person and in some very interesting pictures that he gives to us here.

He says in the next verse, “He is like a tree planted by streams of water.”¹⁵ We have some trees on our property in our home, some very beautiful trees. Most of them my wife planted and they have grown over the years that we have been there. And one of the things that is absolutely necessary for those trees is that they receive water. We have to soak them with water. I have often thought how neat it would be if a stream of water were flowing by over the ground, or an underground stream that constantly brought water and nourishment to the tree. Wouldn't that be neat? You wouldn't have to water it. You know, and all of the nourishment would be brought to that tree.

Well, this is the picture that is given here. It says, “This person is like a tree that is planted.”

In other words it is a tree that is securely rooted to the ground. That tree, you know, is not going to fall over. That tree...if you went by and ran into it with an automobile would destroy the automobile and not the tree. It would take a bulldozer to maybe knock that tree over. It is planted firmly, securely in the ground. That is the picture of someone who

¹⁵ Psalm 1:3

knows the Scriptures and loves the Lord, planted firmly. Nothing can move him or her. You can hear all of the teaching of false doctrine, all of the enticement to be going to the world's things and nothing will pull this person away because he is planted firmly in the ground of God's Word.

But not only that, there is a stream of water constantly flowing by, constantly bringing nourishment to this tree. And so it is with the man or woman of God who is firmly planted. The Word of God becomes that nourishing water that constantly flows and brings to the person the spiritual nourishment that is needed for that person to live a godly life for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“He is a...he is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season.”¹⁶

You know, a tree, a fruit tree that doesn't bear fruit is pretty useless, isn't it? I mean have you ever had a tree like that? I mean it is supposed to grow apples, but there are no apples on the thing. Year after year it grows and there is nothing there, a peach tree with no peaches, not very valuable, is it?

Well, God says that the Christian who loves the Lord, the one who is planted by streams of water, the nourishing water of the Word of God, that person, we are told, yields its fruit in season.

The word of God tells us what the fruit is. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness...”¹⁷ And you can read the rest of them in the book of Galatians. That is the first kind of fruit. The manner of life that this person lives, that you can look at this individual and you can see these fruits of the Spirit, the joy and the happiness, the peace, the patience, longsuffering...that should be the picture of one who loves the Lord.

And the other kind of fruit is the fruit of souls that will come to know Christ because of the testimony of this individual. And so the person who is like the tree planted by rivers of water, that individual will, in fact, bring forth fruit for the glory of God.

It also says, “And his leaf does not wither.”¹⁸

I like evergreen trees. Do you like them? Do you know what I like about evergreen trees? I don't care what time of year it is, they are green. I mean, they look beautiful all year round.

We are from the North and where I grew up in the state of Pennsylvania I mean the winter comes and all the leaves are gone from the trees. I mean they are all gone. And all you have is bare trees except for the evergreen tree. And you can look at that and it still is green and it is still beautiful.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Galatians 5:22

¹⁸ Ibid.

The Word of God says that the one who knows the Lord, meditates in the Word, is like a tree planted by streams of water. It says, “It’s leaf does not wither.”¹⁹ In other words, there is a consistency in the life, that there is an evergreen tree growing and never changing. That is what the person is like.

How many of us want to have a life like that, consistent for the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, and then it says, “In all that he does he prospers.”²⁰

That doesn’t mean he is going to become a millionaire, because that is not God’s picture of prosperity. In all that he does he prospers for the glory of God. What he does brings glory to God. What he does makes him to be a better servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is true prosperity in the eyes of God.

Well, there is a contrast now. We have this person like a tree planted by streams of water bringing forth fruit, the tree, the leaves not withering. And then God says, “The wicked are not so.”²¹

Now I want you to notice that that word “wicked” is the same word that was used up in the earlier portion of this chapter. And it has the idea of those who do not know God. Those who do not know God are not like this. They are not like a tree planted by rivers of water. They don’t constantly bear fruit. Their tree...their leaves are not leaves that will never wither. But instead they are like the chaff that the wind drives away.

Now we have to go back to that day and the way that they dealt with wheat and in that day. Today there are different methods, but this is what was done in that day. If you had the crop of wheat and here it was in front of you. You know, there are little husks around the shell of wheat and the little husks are useless. It is called the chaff. You need to get rid of it. And what they would do is they would first take an implement and they would pound it and pound it. And then they would take the wheat and they would throw it up into the air. And the heavier wheat would fall down to the ground, but the chaff, that outer coating, the wind would blow away. And it was useless. It was no good. That was what you didn’t want. You wanted to get rid of it.

God says, “Those who don’t know him, those who are the ungodly, those who know not the Lord are like the chaff that the wind drives away.” How much more useless can you possibly be? If you don’t know God, you cannot have a life that is truly useful in his sight. You cannot be like that tree that is planted, that is constantly nourished, but instead you are like the outer covering on wheat that blows away with the wind.

They are like the chaff that the wind drives away.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Psalm 1:4

“Therefore,” we are told, “the wicked,” those who know not God, “will not stand in the judgment.”²² They will fall in the judgment. They will be condemned in the judgment. “Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.”²³

Do you see what he is saying here? He is saying that if you don’t know God there will come a time when there will be a judgment and you will not stand in the presence of God. You will fall. You will not be judged as righteous in the sight of God. You will be seen as ungodly and just like chaff to be driven away. What a horrible thought.

Oh, my friends, if you don’t know the Lord you are on the wrong team. Trust in him and turn to him in faith believing that you are going to have life and that life will make you like a tree planted in firm ground.

And then he goes on to say, “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”²⁴

Now what does that mean, the Lord knows the way of the righteous? Does that imply that there are things that God does not know? That is not what it is talking about at all. The word “know” is often used in the Bible to talk about that which is approved, that which is loved.

Let me give you an example. It says in the beginning of the book of Genesis that Adam knew his wife Eve and she bore a child.²⁵ That doesn’t mean that Adam knew who she was. It doesn’t mean that Adam said, “Hey, Eve, I know you.”

No. It means that they had an intimate relationship that led to the birth of a child. In Scripture it says, “of Israel.” Amos was talking. He said, “You only have I known of all the nations of the world.”²⁶ Does that mean that God doesn’t know anything about all the other nations? Of course not. He knows everything. It means that he loves these people in a very special way, that they are his and he loves them.

Well, here when it says, “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,”²⁷ it is saying the Lord approves, the Lord loves the way of the righteous. He loves those who know him and honor him. “But the way of the wicked will perish.”²⁸

We need to ask ourselves a question today. Where do we fit into the scheme of things? Are we those who know not the Lord? Are we among those people who have no real knowledge of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? Or have we come to know him as our Savior?

²² Psalm 1:5

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Psalm 1:6

²⁵ See Genesis 4:1

²⁶ See Amos 3:2

²⁷ Psalm 1:6

²⁸ Ibid.

This, my friends, is the most important question that we ever face in our lives. And as I look out on a congregation and I think I know just about everybody here, but I don't know the hearts of every person. And I just ask you to search your own heart and ask, "Have I really come to know the Savior? Do I know him as my Lord and master."

If not, I challenge you to turn from sin and turn to him in faith believing.

That is the first question that we need to answer.

The second question is this. If we know him, are we utilizing everything that he has given us that we might truly grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Savior? He has given us a direction book for life. It is the Bible. Are we pondering it, studying it, making it a part of our lives? Does it direct how we do the things that we do? Does it direct the paths in which we walk? If it does, praise God. If not, my friend, I encourage you. Get into the Word. Get to know it. Get to love it. Make it a vital part of your life and you will find yourself to be like that tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit with leaves that do not wither.

May this be a picture of each one of us today.

Let us pray.

Our heavenly Father, we thank you. You have loved us with an everlasting love. You have given to us the blessings of eternal life, the joy of knowing you as our Savior and our Lord. And we ask, our Father, that you will help us to live our lives in such a way that the Lord Jesus will truly be glorified in each and every thing that we say and do. Help us, Father, to honor you and may it be that if there is anyone here today that knows you not, that you might open the heart of this person to understand, receive and believe the gospel, that there might be true and eternal life for each of our people we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.