

Psalm 1 The Blessed Way

Have you ever felt like things were going 90 miles an hour? Have you ever had the opposite feeling and felt like things were standing still? How many of you are convinced that you are going somewhere? Followers of Jesus confess that everyone is going somewhere, there is more than this life, more than this world, more than what our eyes can see. For those of you who are older here today you have the fortunate position of perspective, for those who are younger, you don't have the ability to see this yet, but you will. For those of you who are younger who are awaiting the journey, and those of you who are older who may believe that you have already had your journey, listen close. The Bible says that you are on a journey this morning. All of us, no matter our age or societal status are all on a journey. The only qualification to be on this journey is to have air in your lungs. This journey is very perilous and though there may be several paths there are only two ways: The way of life and the way of death.

This morning we get to be reminded of our journey as we are every Sunday, but this time a little more specific as we begin a short series looking at the Psalms. Athanasius said the Psalms were "the epitome of the whole Scripture." Psalms is a book of poetry, a book that teaches us about God and must be read in light of Christ, but God choosing poetry to teach us about himself is key. Poetry is intended to arouse our emotions, stimulate our imagination, and appeal to our will. C.S. Lewis said, "Psalms are poems, and poems are intended to be sung; not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons." (1961:10)

Read Psalm 1

Did you hear the two ways: The way of the blessed and the way of the wicked?

What is the way of the blessed?

1. God's Goal For Humanity is Blessedness

Isn't it interesting how God chooses to open his hymn book? The first word is profound. It is not holiness, righteousness, glory, or any other word; the choice of God to begin in this way is, blessed. This begs the question, 'What does blessed mean?' Have we ever heard this word repeated? Blessed, blessed, blessed? Recall the beginning to the greatest sermon the earth has ever heard, our Lord's Sermon overlooking the Sea of Galilee, in the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... Blessed are the merciful..." (Matthew 5:1-11) There must be something to this word, something for us to pay heed, something for us to by which to be captivated.

To be a blessed one (adjective is bless-ed, verb is blest) means to have the delight of the LORD. To have this describe you means that the God of the Universe, the awesome mighty God who is unmatched in splendor, looks upon you and say, "I am well pleased."

Some translations and commentators prefer the word “happy” over blessed. They point out that the normal term for blessed (*brk*) is not used here suggesting that the full weight of the term is not intended. However, an OT Scholar, Tremper Longman, says, “The two words might overlap in that the one who is blessed (*brk*) may respond by being happy (*esr*). In Psalm 1, the one who obeys God’s covenantal law is happy.” Longman goes on to point out that Deuteronomy 28 says, *And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.* (Deuteronomy 28:1-6 ESV) Covenantal obedience leads to blessing.

This Psalm, as the gateway into the sanctuary of praise, marks out God’s purpose for us, and God’s purpose for you and me is blessedness. It has been this way since the beginning. The Bible says in Genesis that Adam and Eve were created in a state of blessedness. What is the first thing that we have recorded that comes from God to Adam and Eve? *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them.* (Genesis 1:27-28)

Look around. After a week like this week, a week that started in celebrating the freedom of the democratic republic of the United States of America, a land that our benevolent God has surely been good too, a week that started with the celebration of freedom, a chance for us to for a moment forget about so much trouble was soon interrupted by 3 incidents that reveal how far we are from God’s intentions of blessedness. Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, the death of 5 officers in Dallas, TX at the hands of a cowardly sniper while the officers were protecting the crowd’s right for peaceful protest. All these events, and the many more that have stained our landscape over the past years all reveal a deep divide, a deep divide of a needed reconciliation.

The divide is deeper than black and white, governments and people, the divide is a fracture between humanity and God. The only way for reconciliation in humanity is when humanity is reconciled to God. God’s purpose is blessedness even in the midst of our brokenness and as God’s purpose, we can rest assured that he will fulfill what he intends. God is pursuing you, pursuing me, pursuing the vilest offender who truly believes, and has guaranteed that at that moment of belief, from Jesus a pardon they will receive. That soul though all hell should endeavor to shake, he’ll never, no never, no never, forsake.

Look at the way for blessedness. This blessed man has certain qualities about him:

- His delight is in the law of the Lord
- He meditates on it day and night

Now, let’s stop here for just a moment. Who here can say with full certainty that your delight is in the Law of the Lord? Who here can say that every waking moment of your life is meditation day and night? The qualification for the Lord’s delight leaves us desperate because at once we see this as our desire and see how far we are from it, left to ourselves. But thanks be to God that he

has not left us to ourselves. Psalm 1 is not simply about me and you. It is about me and you, but not simply about me and you.

Let's do a little Hebrew work again this morning. I want you to notice the word *man*. Underneath our English word man is the Hebrew word *ish*. This word carries the ideas of a representative.

This Psalm is about the one man to rule all men. We are blessed by being in the one who can say *I always do the things that are pleasing to him [the Father]*. (John 8:29) Those who are blessed are those with whom God is well pleased. This is the reason for our One Lord Jesus Christ's Incarnation. At the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ the heavens opened, the Spirit descends, and the Father says, *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*. (Matthew 3:17)

We who are in Christ are the blessed ones. Gregory of Nyssa says, Likeness to God is the definition to human blessedness." (*On the Inscriptions of the Psalms* 1.1.5-6 in ACC, VII, 3). Psalm 1 is true about Jesus, and the only way for it to be true of us is our participation in him. Now, look at Psalm 1. How many of you want it to be true of you? You have to believe on Him who was sent, the one who took away our unblessedness so that we could share in his blessedness.

Let's look a little deeper into the Psalm before we leave it:

2. A Blessed Life is a Prosperous Life

What makes this one blessed? His delight is in the Law of the LORD and on it he meditates day and night. This is a perfect picture of righteousness, a perfect picture of Christ and us as we are in him. Those delighting in and meditating on the Law of the LORD cannot entertain anything else because they are consumed by the way of God. They won't walk, stand, or sit with evil. The result of this is a life that bears fruit that is pleasing to God.

Jesus told us that the Father is pleased and desires that we bear much fruit. John 15:8 says, *By this the Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples*. When Jesus says this he is headed to the Cross, headed to the grave, headed to burst the cords of death with his life, headed to conquer sin and death, headed to end the hostility between God and man, headed to turn unblessedness to blessedness. He says what he says in John 15 while speaking of vines and branches, which makes perfect sense if we read John 15 in light of Psalm 1.

Notice the permanence of the tree:

- Its fruit comes in its season - faithfulness
- Its leaf does not wither - endurance
- In other words: In all that he does he prospers. This is the perfect picture of success with no chance of failure!

Some wish that the Psalm stopped right there, but it doesn't. Happily ever afters don't come without great conflict. Verse 4 marks the contrast. Using the imagery of vegetation and growth, the simile continues but this time the Psalm gives us a portrait of the wicked.

3. A Life Without Blessing is No Life At All

The wicked, unlike the lush fruitful evergreen planted by water, are likened to dry, dusty, dead chaff. The wicked will not even merit a hearing with God nor be amongst the congregation of saints. Can you hear the longing in Psalm 1? In this world that seems to be dominated by wickedness, Psalm 1 tells the clear story - *the way of the wicked will perish*. The title of Psalm 1 is Psalm 1. It is the first praise. The entire hymnbook is a hymnbook of praise. But did you know that laments outnumber the hymns and yet God has chosen to title his book Praise or Psalms. God turns weeping into dancing (Psalm 30).

Psalm 1 deals with true expectation. For the blessed ones there is an expectation of prosperity, an eternal look from our Lord that says, I know you, I love you, You are my delight. But for the wicked, the expectation is dread, judgment, fear. God will look eternally towards the wicked and say, depart from me, I never knew you. *The LORD knows the way father righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

I want to end this morning with a quote from Augustine. While reflecting on Scripture, Augustine says,

What do you want? To have temporal things and to pass away together with time or not to love the world and to live forever with God? The river of temporal things carries us along, but like a tree growing near a river is our Lord Jesus Christ. He assumed flesh, died, rose again, ascended into heaven. He wanted so to speak, to plant himself near the river of temporal things. Are you being swept headlong? Take hold of the wood. Does love of the world whirl you about? Take hold of Christ. For your sake was the temporal made that you may become eternal. (*Homilies on 1 John 2.10.2 in ACC, VII, 8*)

There are two ways set before us today from our Lord in this Psalm. One is a way of life, the other is a way of death, the Lord calls to all of us and says, choose life that you may live. (Deuteronomy 30:15-20) Those who believe prosper, those who remain in unbelief, die. Which are you today?