

TWO ROADS, TWO DESTINIES

Psalm 1

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

June 19, 2016

Psalm 1

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.

INTRODUCTION

This summer we begin a series I'm calling, "Summer in the Psalms." I hope to preach through some of your favorite psalms over the course of the next couple of months before we begin the Gospel of John this fall.

The Impact of the Book of Psalms

The book of Psalms has had a profound impact on God's people throughout the centuries. Certainly, part of the book's impact is its length.

- It's the longest book in the Bible.
- Contains the longest chapter in the Bible (Psalm 119).
- It stands in the very center of the Bible.

The length of the book isn't the *primary* reason why it has been so impactful on God's people, but its length certainly does contribute to its impact.

It was written by more authors than any other book in the Bible (minimally 7). It was written over a longer time period than any other book in the Bible —over 900 years.

- Psalm 90 was written by Moses around perhaps 1410 B.C.
- Psalm 126 was likely the last psalm written around perhaps as late as 430 B.C.

All this contributes to making Psalms such an impactful book because it captures the whole range of emotions of God's people and gives voice to our struggles, our trials, our fears, our joys, our thanksgiving, our need for God in many circumstances regardless of time period or culture or geography.

There's another reason why the book of Psalms is beloved, and that's that they are really worship songs. This is the first hymn book of God's people—and the only inspired hymn book. The title of the book in Hebrew is "Praises" or "Book of Praises." We get the title Psalms from Greek. Originally, the Greek word "psalm" meant a song sung to a stringed instrument. This is a book of 150 chapters of inspired worship songs. It's no wonder why God's people over thousands of years have returned again and again to the Psalter in every season of life for comfort, encouragement, and instruction.

The Impact on Martin Luther

One example of the Psalms profound impact on the church is how it changed Martin Luther's life.

You may remember that when he was converted through his study of Paul's letter to the Romans: His meditation on Romans 1:17 ("the righteous shall live by faith") was essentially the spark that started the fire of the Reformation.

But what you might not know is that the Book of Psalms also greatly influenced him. In the years leading up to the Reformation, he taught through the Book of Psalms.

Steve Lawson, who has written a biography of Luther, writes:

"While Romans formulated Luther's doctrinal convictions about the purity of the true gospel, Psalms gave him the courage to proclaim these truths fearlessly. His personal study of the Psalms instilled within him such a high view of God that he developed devil-defying boldness to stand alone against the world for the truth of the gospel of God's grace. The Psalms gave Luther an unconquerable spirit and indomitable will to trust God, no matter what happened to him."

So Romans gave him his doctrine. Psalms gave him his courage. In his latter years, Luther suffered from discouragement, despair, and even depression. In those dark days, he would often sing with a friend a version of Psalm 46 set to music. That song became known as the great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

So the psalms have been powerfully used by God. And many of you could give testimonies of how God met you in the psalms during critical points in your life.

Psalm 1 as the Preface to the Psalter

We start our Summer in the Psalms series this morning with Psalm 1. We start there not simply because it's the first psalm. We start there because it serves as a roadmap for all the rest of the psalms. Psalm 1 wasn't the first psalm to be written—that's not why it is first. As the Book of Psalms was compiled, Psalm 1 was intentionally placed at the beginning. Psalm 1 serves as the

preface to the Book of Psalms. It wasn't just considered another psalm, but the introduction to the whole Psalter. It is the Psalm of Psalms.

Psalm 1 stands at the beginning like a sign marking the path of the righteous, directing all travelers who would study God's word to the path of God's blessings. It teaches us the way of the righteous is blessed. And it warns us of the sure destruction of the wicked.

In this psalm, the author writes of two roads in life—the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked—and these two roads lead to two opposite, eternal destinies—one to life, and one to death. So we'll see contrasted two roads and two destinies.

I. TWO ROADS

The first five verses contrast the road of the righteous versus the road of the wicked. We see in verse 1, the blessed man, who is called righteous in v. 6. And the contrast is the one who is wicked (see v. 4). The righteous, in this context, means someone who does right in God's sight. It's a person who obeys God and submits themselves to God's way of salvation.

The "wicked" doesn't refer to the most evil of people. It means those that remain guilty before God. These wicked people actually might be nice people, good neighbors, friendly at work, fun to be around. But they are called wicked because they have rejected their Creator, chosen to live in rebellion against his laws, and refuse his provision of salvation. They are the ungodly because they have no reverence for the true God.

This side of the cross, we can say that the contrast here is between those who are believers (the righteous) and those who are unbelievers (the wicked)

Let's look first at the road of the righteous—and we'll spend the most time on this one.

A. THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

v. 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;

Blessed and Its Meaning

The psalm opens with a description of the one who is blessed. What does "blessed" mean? Some would translate this, "Happy is the man." And blessed does carry the meaning of happiness. But *this* kind of happiness has deep roots. It's more than a feeling that comes about because of good circumstances. This psalm describes the one whose undercurrent is settled joy—a content pleasure in being one of God's own who experiences the blessings of God.

And the blessings of God are many. In fact, in the Hebrew, "blessed" is plural: so perhaps "blessed upon blessed" conveys the right idea ("blessed upon blessed is the man. . .") The blessed man—the righteous man—is described both negatively and positively.

Negatively Described

A righteous man is described not only by what he does, but by what he *never* does. This is what the righteous man does not do:

First, he does not walk in the counsel of the wicked: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.” The blessed man does not receive the advice of those who oppose God. He knows they hold a worldview that he does not share, so he is careful about coming under their influence. He does not adapt his lifestyle to those who oppose God.

Second, he does not stand in the way of sinners. Standing in the way of sinners would be to become attracted to their way of sin. The one who God blesses is the one who resists the enticements of those who are characterized by sin.

Third, he does not sit in the seat of scoffers. To sit with the scoffers would be to join them in mocking God. Notice there seems to be a progression of sinfulness in the descriptions used in v. 1. There is an ascending intensity in the words used and a descending depravity. The words used describe the ungodly are wicked—sinners—scoffers. The wicked, as I said, are those who stand guilty before God. Sinners are those who persist in the practice of their sin. Scoffers are those who mock God and ridicule the righteous.

The verbs also intensify in v.1: from walking to standing to sitting. Walking implies changing the course of your life to adapt to the wicked counsel. Standing implies intentionally stopping to consider the lifestyle of the sinner. Sitting implies fully joining in with the scoffers and becoming one of them.

Depravity only goes one way: down. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:13: “evil people. . . go from bad to worse”. If you begin by taking the spiritual guidance of the ungodly, you’ll learn to live like them, and may finally join the worst of them by ridiculing your Creator. Blessedness (enduring joy) is not found along the well-worn path of the ungodly.

Instead, the blessed man is whose. . .

v. 2: delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Positively Described

Here is the positive description of the righteous man. Here’s what he does: he “delights in the law of the Lord.” Law is the Hebrew word *torah*. Torah can more formally refer to the first five books of the Bible—the Law of Moses—or it can refer to a commandment or a group of commandments (e.g., Ten Commandments). More generally, it means the instruction of the Lord. That’s what I think the psalmist means here.

The blessed man’s delight is in the whole instruction of the Lord—that is, all the Scriptures. The blessed man delights in God’s instruction. He loves God’s law. He enjoys it. He is drawn to it. That’s why he “meditates on it day and night.”

In those days, you didn't have your own personal copy of God's Word. You had to hear it and then memorize it, so that you can meditate on it day and night. Meditation is to think on it—to roll it around in your mind. "Night and day" doesn't mean he has two devotional times a day—once in the morning and once in the evening. Rather, the idea is that he contemplates God's instruction throughout the day—both day and night—all the time. He knows the word and thinks on it all throughout the day. So the blessed man is the one who delights and meditates on God's instructions.

But implied here is also that the blessed man is a doer of the word. If you only thought about God's instructions, but didn't live according to them, you wouldn't delight in God's law. The law would condemn you and there would be no delight. So those who delight in God's instructions are also those who walk in his instructions. They are not hearers only, but doers as well. The source of happiness—the source of blessedness—is delighting in, meditating on, and doing God's commands. The whole of the OT demonstrates that there is blessing in obedience.

Illustration of a Tree

The psalmist gives us an illustration to help us understand what the one who delights and meditates on God's law is like.

v. 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.

The picture is a thriving tree in an arid land. The tree is next to streams of water. Not just one stream—but many streams. The streams keep the tree well-watered so that it flourishes. And at the expected time, the tree bears fruit. The tree isn't affected by seasons of drought—its leaf doesn't wither.

In the illustration, the blessed, godly man is the tree and the water is the Word of God. If you're a Christian, you've been planted by God. And your spiritual nourishment is to come from the Word of God. "Streams" (plural) emphasizes the abundance of the nourishment received from the word of God. The Scriptures are sufficient for your every spiritual need. Just as water is the source of sustaining life for a tree, so are the Scriptures for believers.

Just as a tree produces as it should when it is well nourished, so do believers produce fruit when nourished by the word of God. Fruit is the expected result of a nourished tree. Fruit is the expected result of a godly person. A tree doesn't bear fruit for itself, but for others. So you being nourished by the word of God will become a source of nourishment for others.

So the key to bearing fruit in every season is to receive nourishment from the streams—to delight yourself in the word of God and to meditate on the word of God. If you do this, your leaf will not wither. That is, when the drought comes, you will not wither away. Instead, you'll be shade for others and keep on flourishing. All that you do on the basis of God's instruction will have eternal value and lasting results. Then, there's a sweeping promise: "In all that he does, he prospers." The one who draws from the word will enjoy a spiritually enriched life—the fullest life imaginable.

Sadly, there's a second road. . .

B. THE ROAD OF THE WICKED

The spiritual prosperity of the righteous is set in contrast with the condition of the wicked.

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

The righteous bear fruit and prosper spiritually. But the wicked do not. Another illustration is used to describe the wicked—this time an illustration familiar to farmers of those days. When grain was harvested, farmers used a process called winnowing to separate the grain from the rest of the plant that was inedible, called the chaff. For example, a farmer would toss wheat into the air. The heavier grain would fall to the ground and the wind would drive away the chaff. The chaff was just the straw and other matter that wasn't useful. Because the chaff was worthless, it was burned. The wicked are like chaff. They bring no spiritual benefit to anyone. Those who have rooted themselves in evil rather than the streams of the word of God deserve only judgment.

v. 5: Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

Judgment is coming for all who are guilty before God. God in his righteous wrath will judge the wicked. Because they do not love God, nor obey God, nor cast themselves on God for salvation, he will pour out his anger on them.

They will not stand—that is, they will not survive the judgment. They will not join the assembly of the righteous.

So, there is the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. Our direction in life, determines our destination. The road chosen leads to a destination.

So, finally, we turn to the. . .

II. TWO DESTINIES

v. 6: for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

The Lord knows the way of the righteous. The Lord's knowledge here doesn't simply mean he is aware of the way of the righteous. God, of course, knows everything—he is omniscient. "Knows" is set in parallel with "perish." So this is a kind of knowledge that keeps the righteous from perishing. This is a saving knowledge.

In other words, God has an intimate relationship with and care for those who follow after him. This relationship keeps them from perishing. But the wicked are not known by God in this sense and therefore, they perish. The way of the righteous leads to eternal life. The way of the wicked leads to death and destruction.

CONCLUSION

There are only two roads: the road of the righteous and the road of the wicked. And there are only two destinies: eternal life or eternal damnation. There is no third way. And no third destination.

This psalm reminds us of the blessing of the righteous road and warns us of the danger of the wicked road. Which path are you on and how would you know? The path you want to be on is the righteous path. But how can anyone be on the righteous path when we are all sinners?

Romans 3:10 says: “None is righteous, no, not one;

Romans 3:23 says: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

Therefore, left to our own, we would all be on the road of the wicked headed for eternal damnation. How can anyone know they will receive eternal life? Is it enough to be a pretty good person? Will that suffice for the righteous life that God requires? No.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:48: You. . . must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

And because we’ve sinned even once—we are unholy.

James 2:10 says: For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

That is, by breaking even one of God’s laws, we are as guilty as if we broke all of his laws.

So, if we aren’t righteous and we can’t produce the righteousness needed to be accepted by God, how can anyone be on the road of righteousness and receive eternal life? Thankfully, the Scriptures are clear. Jesus Christ came into the world—fully God and fully man. He lived a perfect life that God requires. He is perfectly righteous and obeyed God’s law in every way.

Romans 5:19 tells us that “by the one man’s obedience [Jesus’ obedience] the many will be made righteous.”

That is, it’s possible to have Jesus’ righteousness count as your own. How does that work?

2 Corinthians 5:21: For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.

On the cross, Jesus took our sin and paid our sin penalty. And we receive his righteousness- the very righteousness we need. A righteousness that is not our own. But his alone.

Is everyone saved and made righteous? No. There remains yet the two roads—one leading to destruction. So, then, how do we receive Christ’s righteousness. And the Scriptures are clear: we receive his righteousness as a gift through faith.

Romans 10:4: For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Romans 4:5: To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies [counts righteous] the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Paul in Philippians 3:9 humbly states: “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith”

So we receive Christ’s righteousness through faith. By trusting in Christ’s sacrifice on your behalf—as your substitute—you receive the gift of Christ’s righteousness and will live with God forever. This is the path of the righteous—the path of faith, the path of trusting in Christ.

Which path are you on? There are only two. The path of belief and unbelief. If you are on the path of belief, you are on the path of blessedness and the evidence will be that you delight in God’s instruction and yearn to meditate on God’s will.

So I close with these words of God from Deut 30:19: 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.”