

Psalm 1

Introduction – Psalm 1, leading God's collection of spiritual songs, serves as a preface to all the psalms, instructing us in what we should find in the psalms and what their purpose is for us. It is a very practical psalm, proverbial in its presentation, and so it teaches us that the psalms should have a very practical outworking in the lives of God's people. And, like so many of the psalms, it drips heavy with poetic contrasts and rich emotional imagery – and this also instructs us in the kind of passionate people we are to be.

Two Ways – The fundamental issue of life is set before us in the great contrast of two ways, two roads, portrayed in two earthy illustrations. There are ultimately only two ways in life: one leads to blessedness and the other to the Abyss. And the psalm forces a question upon us – which man are we, the wicked or the wise? *“As we enter the sanctuary of the psalms to worship and petition the Lord, whose side are we on?”* – Longman

Blessednesses (v1) – “O, the blessednesses of the man...” it could be translated. In the midst of a fallen world, it is possible to be “righteous.” It is possible for there to be genuine happiness; and in His grace, God offers it to us.

Negatively Described – Blessedness is first described in terms of what this man does not do. This highlights the antithesis. It also highlights our natural tendencies in our fallen state, which is to follow the path of the ungodly. Not doing so (from the heart) is a sign of a changed heart – and this is the beginning of all blessedness.

The Progression – The ungodly do not show up at your door with a sign saying “wicked counsel.” Evil, wickedness, ungodly counsel, and the devil himself, appear as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:3, 14). The progression goes from listening to counsel, to standing in their path, to finally sitting with them in full compliance and agreement (Rom 1:28-31). What should we learn about entertaining ourselves with the counsel of the ungodly?

Who Is This Man? – Even before we go on, it is important to note that the psalmist is not harping on us to be moralists. Augustine said, *“This is to be understood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord-Man.”* Blessedness of this kind is rooted in our union with Christ, our adoption by the Father, and our favored status in Him. Ah, but we will have to meditate upon this psalm a bit to get there – and so, the psalmist continues...

Positive Blessedness (vv2-3) – The Lord's blessedness is something which is only ultimately known by Him, but which we are nonetheless instructed to look for in the following ways.

He Delights – Our love of salvation is linked to a love for God's Word, His Law to us (Ps 119:174). It is an amazing transformation of the person, not of the Word, that is in view – *“It is one thing to be in the law, another to be under the law. Whoso is in the law, acts according to the law: whoso is under the law, is acted upon according to the law – the one therefore is free, the other a slave.”* - Augustine

He Meditates – What does Christian meditation look like? Read the 150 psalms, for over and over the stories of God's redemption, the crying out to God for deliverance, questioning God, standing and applying His promises in the here and now, pouring out one's praise and adoration and awe, these are what the *meditator* is singing. And he is singing.

He Is Like A Tree – This beautiful, biblical picture of the righteous emphasizes the results of being planted, not the rewards. The tree is not earning the living waters; the tree wasn't left to choose for itself where it was to be planted. The tree has been planted and this implies a Planter or a Husbandman, one who cultivates and protects from the last great uprooting (Matt 15:13). And He plants this tree by *“the rivers of pardon, the rivers of grace, the rivers of promise, and the rivers of communion with Christ...(which are)...never failing sources of supply”* – Spurgeon. Christ's words in John 7:37, and 4:10, 14 come to mind.

Fruitful and Flourishing - Heavy with fruit and lovely with unwithering leaves, this is the description of the righteous. The scriptures teach us that temporal prosperity is to have a place subordinate to spiritual prosperity, but it does not set them at odds with one another necessarily (1 Tim 4:8). As a general rule (proverbially), *whatever* the righteous man does prospers.

Not So, The Wicked (vv4-5) – Threshing floors are often set on hills where the breeze blows free. The heavier grain falls back and the chaff is scattered, for it is considered worthless. No one laments, no one mourns, no one thinks it wrong, once the chaff is recognized for what it is – it is driven away (and the picture of our fallen parents, driven away from the Garden, should also come to mind).

Chaff and Wheat and the Great Judgment – The psalmist's word-picture is even more profound when one prepares to preach. How often is the preacher unaware of who is truly the wheat and who is truly the chaff? And so he takes the winnowing fork of the Word and throws it all up into the air. If you are chaff, you will die, but you will not die. Truly, you will depart to a fire that will never be quenched (Matt 3:12). But today is not the final judgment, and so the Word is near to you saying, *“is your sin so luscious that you would burn in hell for eternity for its pleasures today?”*

The Lord Knows (v6) – God knows the way of the righteous, not that he does not know (the facts or the persons) the way of the wicked. But we do not, especially in our sin – *“there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”* (Prov 14:12). The Lord knows the way because the Lord Jesus Christ is the Way (John 14:6). And in His omniscience, Jesus will turn to those who were not in Him, not in the Way of the righteous and say, *“I never knew you”* (Matt 7:23).

The Preface to the Psalms – This is what the psalms do for us. In our meditation over them, we are confronted with –

The Antithesis – In everything before us, there is the way of the righteous and the way of the ungodly. We must not listen to the counsel of the ungodly when they are rejecting the Word of God; and as Eve did not do, even when they are speaking the Word of God, we had better be careful.

Our Need, Our Opportunity, and our Delight – We need the Word of God like a baby needs milk (1 Peter 2) and like a tree needs rivers of water. We have been given the gift of the psalms to meet this need and so we endeavor to grow in our ability to sing them. But just as important is that we delight in them, abandoning ourselves into the Word of God.

Seek the Blessednesses of God's Favored People – For you, in Christ Jesus, are God's favored people. You are the righteous, for He is your righteousness.

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