

A right way to live?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 July 2025

Preacher: Richard Honeysett

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Good to see you. I don't know if you're one for noticing! Adverts on TV, or whether like me, they kind of largely pass you by. But there's one thing I've noticed over the last few years that there's been a kind of change of focus in the advertising campaign. So I remember advertising slogans always used to refer directly to the product that they were promoting. So Gillette, the best... Beans? Washing machines? See, you're all over it. But now, companies seem increasingly to kind of tap into a sense of what is right and what is just. So if you take this Ben & Jerry's advert from just a few years ago,

I think probably two or three years ago, Peace, Love, and Ice Cream. And this company holds a festival of peace every year. Apple's advert? Privacy. That's iPhone. It gets right to the consumer's sense of what they're looking for morally in a communications company, the protection of their data. And then there's this example from Nike, which you might not be able to read.

And it says, believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything. Here, the belief is not even specified. It's kind of like a secondary issue. But the company are saying, you know, commit fully to the cause that you believe is right. I'll get rid of these before YouTube stops us.

In many ways, these brands are onto something. They know that deep down in all of us is a clear sense of what the right thing to do is. And peace and love and maybe a right to privacy are all kind of principles we'd want to hold to. But I think the difficulty comes when we unpick those concepts. And certain groups define them differently. When one group's view kind of contradicts with another group's view. As Johan said, we're starting a new series in the book of Psalms today. And we're going to approach this series in the order in which they appear in the Bibles. There are 150 Psalms.

[2 : 39] And we're starting today with Psalm 1. So there's quite a long road ahead. But don't worry, we're going to break it up with other series. And we'll see how far we get. But one of the tendencies, I think, when we're looking at the Psalms is that we can often just kind of cherry pick our favorites. You know, a Psalm when we go to when we're feeling low, or a Psalm we go to when we just want to praise God. Or one perhaps when we're kind of fearful of the future. That's all good. But looking at them in a sequence can often help us see some of the themes and ideas and help us to hear what God is saying to us through these songs. And like those adverts, today's Psalm, Psalm 1, speaks right into the issue of what is right. Or should I say who is righteous? So as we look into this first short Psalm, we're going to think about the marks or the signs of the righteous, the source of the righteous, and the heart of the righteous. The marks, the source, and the heart of the righteous. You see, on one level, this Psalm is really quite clear to understand. Verses 1 to 3, if you look at them, they describe the righteous person who's blessed. In contrast, verses 4 and 5 describe the opposite. Those people that reject God and their subsequent fate. And then verse 6 just helpfully concludes the poem by giving us God's perspective. He watches over the righteous, but he dismisses the wicked, as they're called in this Psalm. It's a really bold start to the book, isn't it? If you're putting this songbook, because that's what it is, like an album, together, would you have started like that? It couldn't be clearer, really, that the Psalmist believes that there are two types of people. Those that believe and live for God, and those that don't. And in a world where we like to kind of create a range of more subtle identities that can change over time, they're quite fluid, this opening poem says you're either right in God's eyes or you're not. It's really difficult to find middle ground or a third category here. So what does righteousness look like, according to the writer?

Well, it's interesting, I think, that it's initially defined by what that person doesn't do. The blessed righteous man or woman does not walk in step with the wicked, verse 1, or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. And I think there's a sequence here that shows how this route is very easy to follow. Jesus, if you remember, later calls it the broad way that leads to destruction. It starts with walking in ways that are contrary to God's desire for us, perhaps following

the values of the culture of the day. It can then lead to us remaining or standing, it says, in that place. And it ends up with us being very comfortable and sitting amongst those who dismiss God's very existence, let alone his words to us. It's very easy to go down this road. The psalmist knows that this is the popular route. It's no surprise that the wicked are described in the plural.

Lots of them. Whereas the righteous man, he's on his own. It's really easy, I think, to think about kind of the school playground here or our workplaces. Whereas a Christian, it can be very difficult to remain distinctive when the tide is against us. A God-free life where we set the agenda can appear very, very attractive. And if we think like this, it's very easy for our thoughts to become our habits and our habits to become our lifestyle. If you're a Christian here this morning, this is definitely not a call to withdraw from those who reject God. But it is a call not to pitch our tent there, so to speak, and live in solidarity with these people, sharing their desire to mock anything that's of God, and being drawn to a lifestyle and a way of thinking that denies God's existence and sovereignty. Instead, the righteous man, or the righteous person, set out before us is someone who delights, it says, in the law of the Lord. He or she meditates on God's law day and night. That's in verse 2. And the psalmist says that this brings a blessed life, a word that means deep satisfaction, fulfillment, contentment, if you like. And it's interesting that the writer describes this level of engagement with God as meditation and not study. That word study could be in there, couldn't it? But it's meditation instead. It implies a real engagement with God through the primary way in which he speaks to his people. With the study of God's law, and that's the first five books of the Bible for the readers back then, but more generically, all of the Bible for us today, it can be easily turned into an academic exercise in knowledge, you know, studying for information, the facts, the history. But it says the righteous person meditates on the words of God, and meditation does something with it. When we think of meditation, what do you think of? Probably your minds are drawn to Eastern religions where the purpose is to empty your mind. But meditation biblically is to fill your mind with the words of God, to engage with them, to wrestle with them, to pray through them, and to be moved by them. But also, if we're honest, to sometimes be quite offended by them, and to be convicted by them. Meditating on scripture will sometimes make you very uncomfortable, because scripture is ultimately authoritative, and it speaks into every aspect of our lives. And most of us find authority quite hard. And yet it says here, the righteous person finds a way to delight in this process of meditating on God's word, and it produces fruit in their lives.

[9 : 32] It leads to outward actions that reflect the heart of God. That's the marks of a righteous person. I think you can read this psalm and interpret it in different, probably unintended ways.

Some of us might read this psalm and think, I've got this righteous thing sorted. Yeah, I don't mix with the sort of people being described here. I keep well away. I spend plenty of time each morning reading my Bible, sometimes at night too. I'm kind of exaggerating to emphasize the point, but this kind of reaction echoes the self-righteousness of the Pharisees that Jesus condemned most of all. Or we can respond in a different way. I need to shape up. If I'm to be considered righteous, is that your reaction? I can do this though, yeah? Day and night, did it say? Alarm clock? One hour earlier?

Book of the Bible each day before work? I'm sorted. That's the response of someone trying to find righteousness themselves by their own strength. And in reality, what they're doing there is worshipping the God of self. Or another way we might respond, I don't do this. This is not describing me.

I'm barely opening my Bible, let alone meditating on it. And that's a voice of despair and guilt. You see, if we're really honest, none of us by nature are the righteous men and women of Psalm 1.

[11 : 08] We are very prone to search for our righteousness in all the wrong ways. To be truly fulfilled, we need a better measure of what's right that is less dependent on us.

We're looking at Psalm 1 today, but Psalm 1 and 2 are often linked together as the gateway into the Psalms. And the writer, if you look at the start of the Psalms, the writer of them is unnamed, whereas most of the other Psalms in Book 1, which is Psalms 1 to 41, if you look through those, most of them are named. And these two Psalms are also bookended with blessing. So verse 1 of Psalm 1, blessed is the one. And then if you jump ahead to the end of Psalm 2, blessed are all who take refuge in him. They kind of seem to go together structurally. Psalm 1 points to a blessed righteous man and Psalm 2 to a greater king than earthly kings. And we're blessed if we trust and take refuge in this great king.

I think the anonymous writer or prophet of Psalm 1 and 2 may or may not have been consciously referencing Jesus in these Psalms. I don't know for sure, but there's a shadow that runs through both these poems that points to a sketched out figure of Christ. And I think Jesus knew this. After his resurrection, if you remember, as he sat down with his disciples, Luke in his gospel records in chapter 24 that Jesus said this, this is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms.

The Psalms point us to the risen Savior Jesus. As he read the Psalms, as he probably sung the Psalms when he was growing up, he would have seen and known them pointing to himself as the source of all righteousness and good. There's only one man who has ever spoken Psalm 1, fully believed it to be true, and lived it out. Jesus loved the law of God. He meditated on it day and night. How do we know that?

Well, when we're in a state of desperation, when we're under intense pressure, what comes out of our mouths is normally what's ingrained on our hearts. And for Jesus, in the toughest seasons of his life, it was always the law of God that was on his lips.

[14:01] When he was tempted with food by the devil after not eating for 40 days, it's Deuteronomy chapter 8 that Jesus' first thought goes to. Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

When he's interrogated by the Jewish chief priest, days before his arrest and death, Jesus establishes himself as the cornerstone, which is from Psalm 118, when he says, the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

He's about to be rejected, handed over to be flogged and killed, and he shares that he is the central foundation on whom salvation, righteousness, and God's kingdom are founded.

And of course, most notably, at his death, Jesus bleeds the Psalms. As he hangs on the cross, he's in excruciating pain and agony, and he cries out the opening line of Psalm 22, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And as he nears the end, Psalm 31, verse 5, are amongst his final words, into your hands I commit my spirit. Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night.

[15:24] In Jesus, we find the source of true righteousness. In and of ourselves, we might meditate on the law of God, but as we do this, we often see how far from God's right way we are, because the law of God exposes that in us.

And at this point, we have two choices to make. We can try and meet the demands of the law through our own determination, our morality, our good works, our strength, commitment, but we will inevitably fall short.

Or we can look to the man who kept it for us. The blessed man who, on the cross, he lost his blessing as he took on our inability to keep God's law so that we might inherit his status and become truly right before God.

As Tim Keller, the writer and the Bible teacher, put it, Jesus was becoming the chaff of verse 4. That's the worthless outer shell of the wheat so that we might be planted by streams of water. When we see Psalm 1 through the lens of Jesus, we see where our righteousness comes from. And that gives us a new vision to pursue what is right, that flows from a transformed heart.

[16:56] And I think this helps us to live out our righteous identity as a blessed man or woman of God. Jesus Christ, the source of our righteousness.

And then finally, the transformed heart of the righteous. The readers of the Psalms are delighted in the law of God as they knew that their righteousness came from faith in the God who made those covenant promises with their ancestor Abraham.

And we can delight in the law of God because we know that its demands have been fully met and paid in full by Jesus at the cross. And repentance and faith in him is what counts.

And it is therefore possible for the law to now become a delight because we're freed from the burden of paying for it.

I mentioned meditation earlier, but a couple of things to say about delighting in the Bible as we read and meditate on it that might be helpful for you, particularly if that's not your experience right now.

[18:08] I think meditating on the Bible really helps us with our prayers. Because of what Christ has done for us, we can communicate to the God who created us.

But communication in a productive relationship is two-way. So chewing over a verse or two and then praying to God about what we have read can transform our prayer lives.

Because as we meditate, we receive. And as we pray, we respond. And this sort of praying, I think, has an influence on our decision-making because the root of God's word has taken hold in our life. The alternative to that is that our relationship with God is one way. So we pray when we're under pressure. We might throw up a quick cry for help.

We might pray about our needs. Or we throw up one of those arrow prayers. Or as I heard them recently described, a flare in the air. But if we do that, what we're doing is we're just talking to God. [19:17] We're not listening. If you want something even more practical, Martin Luther, remember him? The Protestant reformer. His approach was to think, how can I praise God from what I've read?

What should I confess to God from what I've read? And what can I now ask of God from what I've read? Praise, confession, and asking.

And then have confidence that the spirit of God will draw alongside you as you meditate. In the New Testament, when Paul is writing to the Christians in Thessalonica, he says, right at the beginning of his letter, he says this, the gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit.

As you meditate, words on the page can catch fire, and they can take root in your heart. Do you recognize this tree?

Yeah? Sadly, no more. But the sycamore gap tree was a famous tree, and it's arguably even more well-known since it was cut down. Its position was kind of unique.

[20:29] Exposed, but some think that it survived and thrived because of the water supply that it got from the elevated ground around it. I think the writer in Psalm 1 has probably a more arid environment in mind, like this picture, when he describes the righteous person like a tree planted by streams of water.

When we put our trust in Jesus, the righteous man, we are planted into a new territory. We're moved from an area of dry, dead ground to a living stream.

It's like we're not meant to be there, but this is the place we occupy by the grace of God. And somewhere we can put our roots really deep, deep into the knowledge that God has made us righteous through Christ, deep into God's word as he speaks to us and changes us through each day, and deep into the promises of God as he watches over us and protects us, verse 6.

It's somewhere where we can truly flourish and live as we were meant to. You see, life circumstances, the storms of life will come, that that tree will get impacted by all sorts of external factors, winds, rain, more likely extreme heat, I think was on the writer's mind perhaps, but its foundations are well grounded.

If you're trusting in Jesus this morning, life might well be throwing all sorts at you right now, but your roots are in the water. And that's the life-giving water that Jesus talks of to the woman at the well in John chapter 4.

[22:14] It's the well that springs to eternal life. You might not feel like you're flourishing, but notice it says, the righteous person yields fruit in season.

This might not be your season right now. You might be older this morning and you might be reflecting on how God has used you in the past, but less so now. Your leaf hasn't withered, verse 3, because your roots are grounded in Jesus.

And others of you might feel like you're not out there at the moment, yielding your fruit because of your current life circumstances. You will yield fruit once more in a different season, in God's perfect timing.

Because even in winter, trees are growing and the roots are sinking deeper. Those adverts from earlier are promoting good fruit in people, making us virtuous, concerned to do good in the world. Seeking righteousness through noble and good causes is admirable, but it has so much more power when it's in line with the righteousness that's given from God.

[23:31] In Jesus, the blessed man of Psalm 1, we have this foundation on which to base our lives that frees us to become the man or the woman of Psalm 1.

As we start this series on Psalms over the next few weeks and we stand at the gateway, I would urge you to consider those two pathways. They're the only two pathways set out before us.

It's the pathway to flourishing in Christ or the pathway without him that leads to destruction that you see in verse 6. Come to Christ and he will set you on the path to life so that your testimony will be of the tree in verse 3.

Let me pray. Father God, thank you for your word. This word from you today is quite stark.

It helps us to see very clearly that without you we're like chaff, blown away in the wind. We'll be discarded and have no place in your presence in eternity.

[24 : 51] But Father, we know you long for us to be the righteous men and women of this psalm.

So thank you that in and through Jesus you've offered us that righteousness.

Help us to humble ourselves and to accept it. And we pray that out of this truth we will live lives that are fruitful where we do good to others and bless others because we've been blessed by you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.