

Two Ways to Live

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

- [0 : 0 0] Okay, Psalm 1. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.
- Thanks very much, Ralph. Well, let's pray together and ask for God's help as we listen to his words. Let's pray.
- Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you in particular this morning for the Psalms.
- We recognize that we need your help in understanding it, so we ask for your Holy Spirit, that your Spirit would give us understanding, opening up our minds to comprehend.
- But also taking what we hear to apply it to our lives, that it would change us and transform us, helping us to be the kind of people you created us to be.
- [1 : 5 0] Help us to see the power of your word, the difference that it makes to our life. In Jesus' name. Amen.
- Amen. Well, Psalm 1. I don't know if you know that the present population of our world stands at approximately 6.6 billion.
- And of these 6.6 billion people, we live in 245 different countries. And on top of that, we are further divided into the 16,912 known people groups that there are.
- And we are further subdivided into one of the 22 major religions of the world. Each one has their own culture, their unique customs and sacred traditions.
- Each one of us have our own way of deciding right from wrong. Each one has their own system of how we should live in this world. But of all the religions and races and cultures that there are, the Bible makes this extraordinary claim.
- [3 : 1 2] There are actually only two kinds of people. And consequently, there are only two ways to live.
- Psalm 1 introduces us to the choice that we all have to make. It's easily divided up. In this psalm, there is the way of the righteous in verses 1 to 3.
- Then there is the way of the wicked in verses 4 to 5. And then these two ways are contrasted in verse 6. If you look at verse 6, it says, For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.
- Many cultures, many religions, but only two ways to live. There's a right way and a wrong way. There's a way that prospers, and there's a way that perishes.
- And what we need to figure out is, what way are we going to live? So let's have a look at these two ways together. First, the way of the righteous, which is marked by listening to the word of God.
- [4 : 2 8] Look at verse 1. It says, Blessed is the man. Blessed simply means a person who is satisfied, somebody who's content and fulfilled.

They're not looking for anything extra. They have everything. So this blessed person, this satisfied and fulfilled person, verse 1, does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, does not stand in the way of sinners, and does not sit in the seat of mockers.

They simply don't need to, because they have everything they need in God's word. Look at verse 2. His delight is in the law of the Lord.

The law refers to the scriptures. It's another way of talking about the Bible, God's word to us. So rather than listening to the world, the righteous listens to the word.

And this exercise of listening is not just a one-off event or something we do on a Sunday morning together. It is a continuous, lifelong discipline. Look at the rest of verse 2.

[5 : 39] On his law, he meditates day and night. Now meditation for us is, often we think of, as emptying our minds and maybe sitting cross-legged with your fingers together and meditation of some sort.

But that's not what meditation is in the Bible. It's not emptying our minds. It's actually filling our minds with God's word. We're to read it.

We're to take it in. We're to think about it. We're to reflect on it. We're to talk about it to one another and to apply it in our lives. And there's good reason for doing this.

Because the person who takes God's word seriously, look at verse 3, We're told they are like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever they do, prosper. I'm not much of a horticulturalist. You'll have to talk to Alex about all that sort of thing.

[6 : 47] But we do have two apple trees in our garden. And at this time of year, you see the changes from what were just sticks. There are now leaves. And the leaves, well the leaves don't change to blossom, but blossom comes along in the plant.

And after that, you've got these tiny little apples. But the point is very simple. It can't produce fruit unless it's cared for, unless it's watered and fed with nutrients.

And so it gives us a wonderful picture of how God's word, when it's listened to, when we take it on board, when we meditate upon it, it actually brings fruitfulness to our life.

Taking in God's word is like this tree planted by a stream of water which yields fruit in season. There is something healthy and vibrant about this life that is engaged with God's word.

It is attractive and beautiful. It is a good way. It is the righteous way. So in verses 1 to 3, we have the way of the righteous.

[7 : 58] Which is marked by listening to the word. And then we have the way of the wicked. In verses 4 to 5, which is marked by listening to the world.

Go back to verse 1. It tells us there that the righteous person does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

Well, the wicked person does walk in the counsel of the wicked. They do stand in the way of sinners and they do sit in the seat of mockers.

So rather than listening to the word, they're spending their time listening to the world. And look at the contrast of this life. Verse 4.

Verse 4 breaks in with this. It says, Not so the wicked. It's making a comparison with what it says in verse 3. The wicked are not like the person in verse 3 who is a tree planted by streams of water which yield as fruit in season.

[9 : 10] Instead, verse 4, the wicked are like chaff. Not like a tree, but like chaff. Now, chaff is that waste which you get around the corn or the grain.

It's of no value whatsoever. The husk, we might call it. It's useless. If you were to go shopping in Tesco's tomorrow morning for your favourite cereal, you're not going to find anything called chaffabix or chafflakes or chaffos.

Why? Because chaff is a waste. It produces nothing of any value whatsoever. It's to be thrown out. In fact, I'm told that it's so useless you can't even start a fire with it.

And so it gives us a terrible picture or image of someone who listens to the world rather than the word. It's a life that is fruitless and all that they produce in the end is worthless.

It's of no value whatsoever. Verse 5, Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment and sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

[10 : 34] the way of the wicked is ultimately destined to fail. It offers nothing in the end. So this psalm makes this contrast between, on the one hand, we've got the way of the righteous listening to the word and the way of the wicked who listen to the world.

It's very important what we listen to. I'm sure you've all heard the health gurus say we are what we eat.

And to some extent that's true. Our health depends on what we take into our bodies. So if we were to eat McDonald's 24-7 we're going to end up in the operating theater needing a new heart, aren't we?

It's not good for you. On the other hand, if we eat the right kind of food, as much as we don't like our greens, we need to eat them because it will produce a vibrant long life.

Well, Psalm 1 is saying to us we are what we listen to. If we listen to the word, well that's a healthy diet. It's going to help us live rightly in God's world.

[11 : 50] Have a look at Psalm 19. We sang about this a little bit earlier on. Psalm 19. This is a psalm that speaks about the greatness of God's word.

Let's pick it up in verse 7 of Psalm 19. Psalm 19. Psalm 19. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. Verse 10. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold.

They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the cone. By them is your servant warned. In keeping them there is great reward. So God's word is good for us.

It's healthy. On the other hand, if we listen to the world, it's going to be an unhealthy diet. It's going to pull us away from God. It's going to leave us without meaning and without purpose.

[13 : 07] Look back at Psalm chapter 1, verse 1. I wonder if you can notice the progression that there is in verse 1. The person who spends their time listening to the world rather than the word.

They start off by walking in the counsel of the wicked. And then they stop, don't they? And they stand in the way of sinners.

And then they progress further. They actually sit down in the seat of mockers. It's a very dangerous progression, isn't it?

When we listen to the world, we start off by thinking like them. And then we kind of make a progression from thinking like them to actually behaving like them.

and then we end up belonging like them. You see, it's most important to think through what or who we are listening to.

[14 : 22] And as we live in this world, there are going to be many voices that are competing for our attention all the time. The atheists will be saying something like this. There's probably no God, so go and enjoy your life.

the pluralists will say, uh-uh, they're wrong. There are actually many gods, so you choose who you want to listen to. And then there's the secularists, and I think that's more what our society is like, and they will say, you're God.

You yourself are God. You listen to yourself. You know better than anybody else what's good for you. And these are the voices that come through the media, they come through our friends, they come through the books we read, and the underlying theme is this.

Whatever you do, don't listen to God. Listen to anything else, but don't listen to God. And it seems that very little has changed from the Garden of Eden, when the devil came along and spoke to Adam and Eve, and said this, did God really say the first point of attack was to tackle what God said.

Don't believe what God said. Yeah, I know he made the world and he made you and he's in charge and he's the boss, but did he really say that? Through Psalm 1, God's voice is crystal clear.

[16:00] word. It's saying do not listen to the world, but listen to the word. The word that spoke creation into existence, the word that made you and sustains you, the word that became flesh and lived among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And remember it is Jesus who said, I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned.

He is crossed over from death to life. So it's an encouragement for us to listen to the word that can save you, the word that can change you and transform you into the kind of people that God created us to be.

we are simply what we listen to. We become what words we take in.

Now this all challenges us to think through which way am I, are we going to live? It presents us with two ways to live.

[17:12] And the question we need to ask individually is which way am I going to live? Now I'm sure we all know which way we do want to live. And we all want to say yep, I want to be the person of verses 1 to 3.

That's me. Well the reality is, so often we are not like the person in verse 1. We do walk, don't we, in the counsel of the wicked.

We all stop and stand in the way of sinners. sinners. And we all sit at the seat of mockers. Now this doesn't mean to say that we have to kind of somehow become like little monks living away off on some little island somewhere and not listen or hear to anybody else.

Now we are in the world, we are with people all the time, but sometimes we become more a part of the world than we ought to.

We join in with other people where we ought not to join in. We agree with what they say rather than challenge what they say. And so often we are not like the person of verse 2.

[18:29] We don't delight in the law of the Lord. It's an absolute drudgery if we're honest to sit down and read our Bible. It comes to reading our Bible and we're not jumping up and down all excited and saying, oh I can't wait to read it.

It's like, gosh do I have to read it? And as far as meditating on it day and night, my goodness me it's hard enough to open my Bible once a week, let alone try and do it day and night.

And I'm sure if we were to do a little survey, myself included, we would be all extremely embarrassed to say how many times we actually did open up our Bibles this week.

So where does it leave us? Although we like the way of the righteous, we like to put ourselves in verses 1 to 3, the reality is we are very often like verses 4 and 5.

And the consequences are serious. Look at verse 6. The Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

[19 : 48] You see, our problem is, and the problem that this psalm confronts, it's like there's a sting in the tail. It all starts off very exciting and yes, I like this, but by the time we get to the end of it, it paints a picture of what we're really like.

And the terrible conclusion is we're not like the way of the righteous, we're like the way of the wicked. We slip up far too often, and we fail too much.

So is there any of us who can actually live the right way? Well, the answer is none of us can live the right way.

But there is another way. There is one who has lived the right way. And more importantly, and the exciting and the good news is, he has lived the right way for us.

He lived a way that we could never live. Do you remember the verse that we started with this morning? It came in 2 Timothy 3 15. I'll read it to you.

[20 : 59] It says, the scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It's telling us that the scriptures, the Bible, the Psalms, included, tell us about Jesus and our salvation and all about Jesus who lived the perfect way for us.

This is what this psalm is pointing us to. It's ultimately pointing us to Jesus who lived the way that we could never live. Where we disobey, he is obeyed.

He not only read God's word, he obeyed God's word in all its fullness. Where we fail, he was faithful. Where we sin, he was without sin. So Jesus came, the word became flesh, he lived his life on earth, he lived the perfect life for us.

But more than that, Jesus not only lived our life, he died our death. He was treated as wicked for us, so that we might be treated righteous like him.

Let me read that again to let it sink down as we reflect on Psalm 1. He was treated as wicked for us so that we might be treated righteous like him.

[22 : 26] He died for us so that we might not perish, but that we might prosper, that we might have eternal life. So through our faith in Jesus who lived the perfect way, we can have salvation.

And then we can read verse 5, in the light of all that Christ has done and know that the wicked, people like me, will be able to stand in the judgment because Christ has taken the judgment for me.

A sinner like me will be in the assembly of the righteous because I am no longer seen with sin, but I am seen with the righteousness of Christ.

All of this comes as we think upon God's word and understand his amazing salvation for us. The way of Christ, he lived the life that we could never live.

So where do we go from here? Well, it might be stating the obvious to say that Psalm 1 is Psalm 1. That it's the very first psalm.

[23 : 43] Well, there's a reason I think that Psalm 1 is Psalm 1 and not Psalm 15 or 38 or something else. Because Psalm 1 is all about the importance of listening to God's word.

It's an introduction. Psalm 1 is an introduction to the rest of the psalms. In other words, it's telling us, don't stop at Psalm 1, but now go and read them all.

Get into God's words. Because it tells us about salvation. It tells us about Christ. It tells us about the way we should live. In fact, the application is wider.

It's saying, read all of Scripture. Because if we do, then we will be like verse 3, that tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season.

Now I know, and I want us to be real about all of this, that we do find reading the Bible hard, don't we? We all find it difficult. It doesn't come easy to us. So I want to encourage us in two ways how we can read the Bible.

[24 : 49] Just two ways in which we can read the Bible. The first is, read the Bible on your own. Nothing difficult, read it on your own. Well, you say to me, but I don't have time to read my Bible, I'm just too busy.

By the time I get up in the morning, I'm having to leave the house at seven o'clock or half seven, I've got to be at work at a certain time, then I'm leaving home to rush home for dinner and see the kids, and then I've got to go out somewhere in the evening.

I just don't have time to sit it in. Well, let me read a quote from a well-known preacher, Martin Lloyd Jones.

He was actually a physician, a doctor as well. And this is what the quote says, Martin Lloyd Jones once spoke with a group of medical students who complained that in the midst of their training and the ferocious work hours, they really didn't have time to read the Bible and have their devotions and so on.

He bristled and said, I am a doctor. I have been where you are. You have time for what you want to do. After a long pause, he said, I make only one exception.

[26 : 07] The mother of preschool age children does not have time and emotional resources. I think that's very important for us all to listen to.

For all the men, and for all the rest of us who don't have kids, we can make all the excuses in the world. But at the end of the day, that's what they are. They're just excuses.

We all have time to watch the footy on telly. We all have time to look at other programs and read magazines. And I'm not saying don't do it. It's good to do it. We've all got time.

We've just got to make it our priority. And the only ones who have a genuine reason, according to Martin Lloyd Jones, and I think it's a good one, are mums.

Those with little kids. I know Kirsty had to look after two little kids. And you get to a certain point of the day and it's just whacked out, mentally, emotionally exhausted.

[27 : 06] Can't even sit and read the Bible and take it in. So if you're a mum here this morning and you're in that situation, you just find it really hard and really tough. Don't beat yourself up about it and get all guilty about it.

But if you're a husband of that mum, you've got a responsibility to make sure that they have time to encourage them, maybe to read it with them, to pray for them, to be that support that they need.

And mums, it doesn't last forever. It is a season, but we do need to gather around and support and to encourage. So first of all, read the Bible on your own.

The second way to read the Bible is to read it with someone else because it provides accountability and support. The Christian life is not something we live on our own.

It's not to be done in isolation. We're to do it with the care and the help and support of one another. And it's something that we encourage very often from the frontier and informally with each other.

[28 : 13] To take somebody who you can sit down with and read the Bible with and challenge them about what it says. I read the Bible with different people and if you're stuck and you have nobody to read it with and you haven't got a friend, I'll be a friend.

I'll read the Bible with you. Very happy to do that. But one of the things I read recently with someone, this is what it said. And it's why it's good to read it with somebody because they ask you things that you would never ask for yourself.

We read these verses. People will be lovers of themselves, lover of money, boastful, proud, abutiful, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power, have nothing to do with them.

Now if I was to read that myself, I'd say, well that's other people, that's not me. The person who I was reading with perched up and says, well Johnny, which one are you? You see, I would never ask that question of myself.

but with somebody else, we are challenging each other over God's word, hearing what it has to say, being accountable and being supportive.

[29 : 31] And if we do miss a day where we don't read the Bible, if we miss two days, if we miss a week, if we miss a month, we need people who will gather around us and encourage us and support us and say, I'll sit down and I'll read it with you and I'll pray with you and encourage you.

Now these two ways, reading the Bible on your own and reading it with somebody else, I don't suggest it's one or the other. I suggest you do the two. You read it on your own, but you also read it with someone else.

Verse 1 of Psalm 1 says, Bless us. The satisfied, content, happy, fulfilled person will never be striving or looking for anything more because we have everything.

For the person who delights in the laws of the Lord, who meditates on a day and night, who will be like a tree plant by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season.

Let's be encouraged to be people who listen to the word rather than listening to the world. Let's pray together.

[30 : 57] Amen. Father God, thank you that you are personal, that you relate to us, that you speak to us.

Change our priorities in our life, change our attitudes, so that we make listening to you the most important thing in our lives.

Help us to listen to what you are saying to us about yourself, about what you're like, about what we're like, and most of all, what Jesus is like, who lived the perfect way for us, who lived the life that we could never live, who died the death for us, so that we would not perish, but that we would prosper and have eternal life.

Help us all to be practical about this. Give us good and inventive ways of reading your words with one another. Help us to support each other and ask each other how we're getting on.

And if somebody's struggling, Lord, give us the courage to get alongside them and read with them and to help them. We pray this in Jesus' name.

[32 : 56] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, we've got a pal, and I think we've sung it before, which reflects, helps us to think through a little bit about what we've been looking at, speak on the word as we■■■ how A