

Like a Tree by the Stream

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Preacher: Matthew Ritskes

[0 : 00] I was going to say, oh good, I wrote it down and then I lost it. Ah, it is now my privilege and what not to introduce to you our speaker for this morning.

Matthew Ritskus, born and raised in Southwest, Saskatchewan, south of Swift Current, down in Dan and Darlene's country.

He can't get away with anything because Dan and Darlene know his folks. So, but he is a graduate. He took four years, took the full four-year program at Miller College of the Bible, graduated last year and has gone into ministry at West Bank Bible Camp, just north of Swift Current, if I remember right. And he's in maintenance there. And I know, having been a director of Bible Camp, what an important job Matthew has in taking care of the facilities.

[1 : 04] And it's not that complicated a job. It can only keep you busy 24-7. So, and sometimes, and Rob will appreciate this, maybe even 25 or 26-7.

But Matthew has a heart for the Lord, and I know he's been looking forward to coming and sharing God's Word with us.

So, Matthew, it's yours. Thank you. I have been quite excited to come here this morning.

I was speaking with Josh on the phone a few weeks ago, and he said that this church has a real love for the Word of God. And that made me quite excited that we get to speak about God's Word this morning and learn from it and study it.

And this morning has already been so good looking at the Psalms, because this morning we're going to be looking at Psalm 1 together. And so that's what I have prepared.

[2 : 12] So thanks for leading us in songs and preparing our hearts for that. So, Psalm 1, if you want to turn there, and then I'll just pray for us before we dive in. Let's pray.

Thank you, Father, for a morning you have made, and that we can rejoice in and be glad that we can meet together to look at your Word and what you've said to us through it, and how we can live in pursuit of you.

So I pray that you'd be with us this morning, that you'd give me the words to say, and that you would help me to put my ego aside and my pride aside, and that we would seek you wholeheartedly.

Amen. So let's read the Psalm together, Psalm 1. I'm reading from the ESV this morning. 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, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. 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.

[3 : 38] The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

So the Psalms are a wonderful book of praises and prayer. And the New Testament writers also use the book of Psalms often, and they quoted it.

It's not the most quoted book in the New Testament, but it's up there. I think Isaiah is number one. And oftentimes when they quote the book of Psalms, it's in reference specifically to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And Psalm 1, as the opening to the book, is no different. We have so much in here about he lays out these two different pathways that we should take. You know, you have live righteously, but also we're going to see this morning how it does point forward to Jesus, and that just intensifies the meaning for us on this side of the cross.

So this morning I'm going to take a look at the first Psalm, and then at the end I want to point us back to Jesus and how this just really makes things greater for us always when we see Jesus. [4 : 59] So I'll pose this question as we start and as we look at it. Where do you want to go in life? And we're going to look at this spiritually. What is your destination or your end goal?

You can think of it as, do you want to be somebody that people look to for guidance? Do you want to be a witness in your workplace? Or a raiser of a godly family?

The psalmist words it like this. I want God to look at my life and smile. And that's what he means when he says, blessed is the man.

May the Lord's face shine upon you. He has this in verse 1 as well as in verse 6. Blessed is the man, verse 1. And then down in verse 6, the Lord knows.

I believe the NIV says the Lord watches. This is a term of intimacy, of the Lord's face shining down. In our Canadian way of thinking, we don't think of knowledge as a very intimate thing.

[6 : 07] Sometimes we think of, like, oh, I know about this. But, you know, what does that mean? The word knowledge in the Old Testament, in the Hebrew, it's not just awareness of something.

It's more of a closeness. When you say that, oh, yeah, I'm close with so-and-so, it's this picture of intimacy. Like, the NIV's saying the Lord watches the righteous.

It's like if you're a parent and you have children, young children, do you know where your children are? Oh, yeah, they're at the park. Or, I'm watching them, right? I'm with them.

This is the picture that the psalmist is laying out. He wants to be close with God. That is his goal. So then, if our goal is to be close to God, to be near to God, how do we get there?

Which pathway are we on, is what the psalmist wants to point out to us. Because the blessed man, he's not following the pathway of the world, but he needs to stay on the pathway of the righteous if this is going to be the case.

[7 : 15] When I was on my drive here, I looked at Google Maps before I came. Last night, I was just looking, okay, this is how I get to Davidson, the quickest way. And then, I think it was Central Butte, the Highway 19 just took a little jog.

But I kept on going straight, because I didn't acknowledge this jog. And so I was just on a gravel road. And I was like, well, I guess this is the way to get there. And then, eventually, there's a sign that you can't go any further.

So I took another turn, and eventually, I ended up back on the Highway 19. And we got here, so that's good. And so, which pathway are we on, spiritually, to get to the spiritual destination of God looking at us and smiling to be near God?

I would say that the best way to determine which path we're on, for me, it was, well, this highway shouldn't be gravel, and it should be continuing going.

The best way for us to determine a spiritual pathway is our delights, actually. I'm not saying to live by our feelings. But what brings you joy in life?

[8 : 28] Is our greatest joy things of the world? Maybe we're in pursuit of things of the world. Is our greatest joy things of God? That is a good indicator.

And this, honestly, is a psalm about delights, a lot. We see his delight is in the law of the Lord. And so that's what I want to look more at.

Proverbs 4.23 says, Out of the abundance of the heart, our mouth speaks.

Our desires deepen our heart. That's going to determine the direction that we take in life. So let's look a little bit more about what this blessedness looks like.

And the psalmist, in verse 1, he describes it by saying something that it's not. Sometimes we like to describe something by saying the negative way of it. Like to say, well, how do I put this?

[9 : 30] I met a missionary from Thailand, and he says it like this. When they want to emphasize something heavily in Thailand, they wouldn't say, oh, yes, this person is very tall. If they say somebody is tall, you acknowledge that they're tall.

But if you want to say he's very tall, you'd say he is not short. And so it's a very different way of thinking. But this is kind of what the psalmist does here. He says, This blessed person, this person who is close to God and near to God, blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, who does not walk in step with the wicked, does not go down their way.

He does not stand in the way of sinners, nor does he sit in the seat of scoffers. Walking in the counsel of the wicked is to take counsel, take advice from the ways of the world.

And oftentimes the devil likes to feed us lies through things that we consume in our lives, as well as the old nature within us, our sinful hearts. When we turn off our thinking, and we just let things filter into us, it can lead us down many dark paths.

There's an expression said by somebody, Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future. And I think that that holds some weight. We need to be diligent with who we take our counsel from.

[10:53] He stands not in the way of sinners. This is a picture of going with the flow, or going down the wide path. But Jesus says that we need to follow the straight and narrow path, because this wide path that everybody wants to go down, because it's easy, it does lead to destruction in the end.

And then he says, Nor does the blessed man sit in the seat of scoffers. Scoffing or mockery, gossip, this is not what the person who is close to God commits himself to.

James says that the tongue is a fire set ablaze by hell. That's very, you know, bold imagery, that our tongues have the power to tear people down.

And so we do need to be careful of these things. So these pictures are, as I said, it's an opposite of the person who is near to God, of being blessed.

And already we have a picture here of delights, and desires, and what our hearts pursue. Take a look at the action words. This man is walking, and then he's standing, and then he's sitting.

[12:11] Flip side, if somebody is sitting, and then he stands up, and then he walks, it means he didn't want to be there anymore, because he got up and left. This person, he goes over to this place, and he lets his peace rest in that area.

A picture of contentment. This is where he wants to be, in the ways of the world. But the psalmist wants to argue, the man who's pursuing God, the one whose God favor rests upon, has a fight against sin.

He is not at peace, with walking in the ways of the world, because he realizes, the destination of that path. So I want to read verse 2.

His delight, is not in walking with the counsel of the wicked, his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates, day and night. So the law.

This is, the word here is Torah, which means instruction, or direction. And it's a very interesting thing, that he says that, this is his delight, law.

[13:23] When I think about this, I think, well, I get, delighting in grace, delighting in God's mercy, delighting in the gospel, but delighting in rules?

This is very interesting to me. And, it's a really cool theme, honestly, throughout the Psalms. You know, even Psalm 119, you know, these statutes and rules, the psalmist is writing about, how they're so glorious to him.

And that's because, these Old Testament writers, and those who were practicing law, understood the purpose of it. The purpose of the law, is not to uphold it, and realize that, we are really good about ourselves, but rather, God gives the rules, which show his character, and his goodness, and his grace.

And when we understand, that we cannot meet God's standard, it reveals to us greater, God's grace. And so, the psalmist is not saying, simply that, rules are good, because I'm really good, at keeping them.

But instead, he says, like, Lord, the more that I see, your rules, and your grace, in spite of my sinfulness, this is just amazing, and it causes great delight.

[14:43] Amen. And so, that's our question for ourselves, is do we delight? We have, you know, being immersed in the scriptures, we have memory of scriptures, which is amazing, but the Pharisees, in the New Testament, also had this, deep knowledge, of the scriptures, but Jesus never said of them, you guys are like, trees planted by streams of water, like, you guys are very strong spiritually.

No, instead he said, beware of the leaven, of the Pharisees, you know, why is this? It's not just about, obeying the law, it's not just about, knowing the law, it's not even just about, doing the law, honestly.

Jesus wants us to be, delighting in, and out of that, it produces fruit. We could say that, the Pharisees, greater delight was, being seen as, great, in the eyes of man, or elevating themselves, above others, and belittling others.

On the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus says a very interesting thing. He says, unless your righteousness, surpasses that of the Pharisees, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Which is very, profound, because we're saying, Jesus never said of them, you guys are doing the right thing, but he says, you do need to act a certain way, you do need to follow these laws, but it can't just be about, be about outward expression, it needs to be about, delighting in God, and God delighting in us, because of his grace, and understanding grace, through the law.

[16:29] So, we have for us, set out these pathways, the way of the righteous, the way of the wicked, and now, he's going to get into, their destinations, in the next few verses.

Verses, three, and verses six, first half of chapter six, talks about, this righteous man, the way of the righteous, and their destination.

Verses four and five, speak about, the way of the wicked, and its destination. So, we're going to start with, the righteous one. I'll just read the whole, verses three to six.

He's 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 wicked are not so, but are like chaff, that the wind drives away.

Therefore, the wicked will not stand, in the judgment, nor sinners, in the congregation, of the righteous. For the Lord knows, the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked, will perish.

[17:35] So, this tree, we have a picture, just by looking at, the words in here, that are used to describe, this person, we have a picture of, strength, provision, longevity, and fruitfulness.

Trees by a stream of water, its leaf never withers, it is strong, and it's sure, and it's going to stand, when the wind comes. And this is amazing, because if this, is absolutely true, if God's promise, in the word, in this psalm, is true, then nothing that we have, is a rip off, in life.

Nothing that comes, we don't have to say, I got the short end, of the stick, because God has promised, the righteous one, will be strong, the righteous one, does have all that he needs, the righteous one, can endure.

And this is, this is very profound. Job, however, was a righteous man, it says in the beginning of Job, that Job was more righteous, than anyone else, on the earth at his time, but he had a hard time, understanding this delight, in the Lord, when the hard times came.

In chapter 32 of Job, Elihu is this younger man, he's been listening, and he's hearing the back and forth, kind of complaints between them, and then he speaks up, when everybody's run out of words to say.

[19:05] He says this of Job, chapter 34, starting in verse 9, or starting in verse 7 actually, What man is like Job, who drinks up scoffing like water, who travels in a company with evildoers, and walks with wicked men.

For he has said, it profits a man nothing, that he should take delight in God. Job definitely did have a journey in front of him, and all around him, but Elihu comes in to remind him, God is not your enemy, he's your friend, and we can delight in him, despite all the things going on around us, because God has promised, and God never lies.

Titus 1, verse 2 says that, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised beforehand, before the ages began. Job lost a little bit of sight of this, amidst the things, but Elihu came to remind him, God is our greatest delight, because he's promised great things, even though we have a hard time seeing it, in our struggles.

He moves on in verse 4, the wicked are not so, but are like chaff, that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

There's so much contrast in this psalm, about pathways of the righteous and the wicked, their destination, and all this. And now in contrast to this strong tree, which does have all that it needs, we have chaff.

[20:45] And if you know chaff, and the wind that we get here in Saskatchewan, if you have a bucket of grain, and you just kind of dump it out like this, the grain will land right there, but where does the chaff go?

Right? It's all over. You can't scatter it. You know, this tree, which, you know, the wind comes, it's fine. This chaff, a gentle breeze, and it's gone.

This is a reminder of the destination, of the pathway that we might choose. This wide pathway that all the world is going down, it looks very appealing in the moment, but the psalmist reminds us it does not last.

So as it was said, I work at a Bible camp, and this past week there's a speaker, his name was Dan Stobie, and he had this story for the kids, one chapel, out of a book, it was called A View from the Zoo.

It's a pretty cool book. It talked about different stories from this veterinarian at the zoo, and all the different things that went on with that, and then through the end of the chapter, he relates it back to these stories of animals, back to God.

[21 : 58] And he had this cool story that I thought, this fits so well with what I'm saying, and he had it photocopied for me, so I was very happy about that. So when we speak about the way of the wicked being like chaff, it reminds me of Bandit, the, oh, what is he?

What are those animals that are like Bandits? Raccoons. That's it. The title of this chapter is called, It Will Be Different For Me.

Bandit was irresistible. No raccoon, oh, there it is, that ever existed had more natural cute than this 90-day-old bundle of mischief.

When my neighbor Julie bought him at the pet store, she was sure that they would be lifelong friends. Everywhere she went, he went, usually perched on her shoulder. Bandit's habit of holding Julie's cheeks in his paws and looking into her eyes with sparkling curiosity always melted her and solicited an affectionate kiss and hug.

And he grew. 18 months passed and Bandit became a strapping 25-pound adolescent raccoon, still full of the dickens and only slightly less playful.

[23 : 17] He still loved affection, rode on shoulders, and seemed to be a one-raccoon advertisement that raccoons make great pets. I mentioned Julie and Bandit to our zoo veterinarian one day and inquired as to why more people didn't keep raccoons as pets.

His answer floored me. They undergo a glandular change at about 24 months. After that, they become unpredictable, independent, and often attack their owners.

Are there exceptions? I inquired. None that I know of, he said thoughtfully. Then Julie is likely to be bitten? Any time now, I should think, the doctor added with conviction.

Since a 30-pound raccoon can be equal to a 100-pound dog in a scrap, I felt compelled to mention the coming change to Julie. She sat and listened politely as I explained what an eminent world authority had shared with me concerning raccoons and their nature.

I'll never forget her answer. It will be different for me. Bandit is different. And she smiled as she added, Bandit wouldn't hurt me.

[24 : 32] He just wouldn't. Three months later, Julie underwent plastic surgery for facial laceration sustained when her adult raccoon attacked her for no apparent reason.

Bandit was released into the wild. That happened about 15 years ago, and I've heard Julie's reply many times since. But it will be different for me. Now, repeat out loud the following phrase, maybe it won't be different for me.

And maybe we should be quicker to say that about sin in our lives. Maybe it won't be different for me. This is what the psalmist is writing about, about sin and following wickedness and this pathway. It's end, you know, like Bandit. I don't know of any exceptions. This is the end of these things. In Daniel chapter 5, King Belshazzar is having this great feast, and he's inviting all the officials, and they have the instruments from the house of God to eat with and all these things.

And he's at the top of the world. But then the handwriting on the wall comes and breaks his party. It says, which means you've been weighed in the balances, a scale, you've been weighed in the balances, and you're found wanting.

[25 : 53] You're found lacking. Belshazzar, you're at the top of the world. You have all that you need, but you don't have everything, and your kingdom is divided.

It will be given to the Medes and the Persians. It goes on there later. So, this psalm teaches us about the destination that we need to pursue, which is a relationship with God and to be seen as loved in his eyes, to be blessed.

It also is a warning, though, about the other pathways which are tempting to us. So now, I want to connect it to Jesus. So, on this side of the cross, it just intensifies this meaning for us.

And to do that, I want to ask, do we know anybody who has completely fulfilled this psalm? Even Job, who is declared righteous, he needs to be corrected by Elihu in his thinking. Jesus, of course, is the righteous tree, whereas we are the wicked chaff. God said of the Son at the baptism of John, from John, this is my Son whom I love. [27 : 10] With Him, I am well pleased. It's this picture of the Lord's face shining upon Jesus. Love. This is the blessed one.

Blessed is the man, right? This is quite amazing when in the New Testament we see so much imagery of we are to be righteous. But it's not of our own righteousness, but instead it's the grace that God extends to us. I want to go to 2 Corinthians here. Chapter 5.

It's a really cool chapter. Verse 21 says this. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

He knew no sin. He is the righteous one, whereas we are like the chaff. But because of His death on the cross, He invites vile sinners like ourselves to become righteous like Himself.

[28 : 16] and it's only because of the cross that we can look at this psalm and say, I want to pursue righteousness. I want to pursue this walk with God because He has pursued me and He has invited me into this.

Even those in the Old Testament looking at the law, like I said, they're looking at it and seeing God's grace and saying, God, I don't know how you would do this.

I can't fulfill the law, but because of your promise of forgiveness and your promises of grace, we're thankful. Psalm 50. This is the psalm about the Lord is the owner of cattle on a thousand hills.

He says that you don't own any of the cattle. I actually own them. The blood of bulls and goats, they don't actually satisfy me, but instead offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise.

And that's what we look to when we're looking at God's grace. And this psalm, though we are not righteous, God has given us the opportunity to grow in Him.

[29 : 26] And the promise of this is like this tree. Even when things are going crazy around us, we have this promise which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.

So with that, I would like to pray for us. Not that we look to the psalms as, in the Bible in general, in the law, as something for ourselves to pursue better on our own efforts, but that we acknowledge better that God is so gracious to us and so good to us and that we have no reason not to delight in Him.

So let me pray. Father, we are so thankful for your grace for us and that though we cannot keep your commands on our own strength, you've sent your Son to die in our place and that you declare us righteous and that you have your favor upon us and that we can be counted blessed because of your love for your Son and therefore for us.

we pray that we would not make light of the gospel but that we'd reflect on these truths more and more as our lives go on. So we thank you for your goodness.

We pray that as we go about our weeks and our day that we would choose the straight and narrow path not because we're able to walk it on our own strength but because you give us the strength to do it.

[30 : 57] Amen. Thank you. I'd like to chat with you guys all more. If I didn't chat with you before the service I'd love to meet you guys so thanks for having me out here.

Thank you.