

Two Paths, Two Kinds of People

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: 13 February 2022

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] So our psalm this morning is about two paths and two kinds of people. You know, we live in an age and in a region of the world where we have more than two choices. And while that may seem like a luxury, it often serves to paralyze us. Endless choice is not always a healthy thing. This might be a simple example, but have you been in the cereal aisle of your grocery store recently? You know what I'm speaking of if that's the case. And in truth, all those choices are really just packaging. They're almost always the same thing, just packaged differently to give you an illusion of difference. And later today, you'll all sit and watch different kinds of advertisements on television. Today being the Super Bowl, that great American holy day. I meant to say holiday. That great American holiday of appealing to our ego. The advertisements will tell you about how powerful you can be, about how beautiful you are, about how happy you can be, if only you buy this product.

And the football game itself is merely a vehicle to selling you the pursuit of happiness. happiness. It's in our constitution after all, isn't it? To be American is to pursue happiness.

And that's not a bad thing, actually. It's not. In fact, to be human is to pursue happiness. The Chinese, the Nigerian, the British, the Russian are all also, along with American, about the pursuit of happiness.

Maybe not the Russian. Have you read any Russian novel lately? I'm not so sure about them. I'm only joking. If you're Russian, I'm sorry, I don't mean to offend you. Every human being is about the pursuit of happiness.

We were created that way. And we ought to, so it's not a bad thing. But while the world might say you can pursue happiness in whatever way you like, the Bible tells us that there is only one way, one way to be truly happy.

[2:43] The other ways are just different packaging that the father of lies, the devil, offers us. He, by the way, is the best ad man out there.

He's the best. He's been in the business longer than all those who will be peddling ads to you today on TV. No offense if you're an ad man, if you're in the ad business.

I don't mean to offend you. At least you're not a lawyer. That's a joke. That's a joke. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I love lawyers. My brother's one.

So, I, I, that's a joke. When we're all in trouble, we do love lawyers. So, that's... So, there are, in fact, in fact, there are only two ways in God's economy.

One is the way to happiness. The other is the way to ruin. And that's what this introductory psalm has to show us.

[3:53] So, turn to page, is it page 4, 520? Well, it's in, in the, in the Pew Bible. It's on page 528. You can follow along in the, in the, in the, in the book of common prayer as well as 2, 28, 270.

So, turn to page 528 in your Pew Bible. And we will, we'll examine this psalm. As, as Lungman puts it, it is as if this psalm serves as a guide.

It's an introductory psalm. It was placed there at the beginning of the, the psalm book, the psalter, intentionally. Because it serves as a guide, telling us, the readers, the worshippers, what sort of people can venture into the sanctuary of God's word?

Into the literary sanctuary of God's word? What sort of people can use this psalm book in a profitable way? And someone summarizes, in fact, the whole of the psalms.

It serves as like a preface. If you read, if you read books, the preface gives you like a small synopsis of what you're about to read. And someone serves as that. Or how we should prayerfully live before God's presence.

[5:13] The psalm begins this way. Blessed is the man who walks, not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits, sits in the seat of scoffers.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in this law, he meditates day and night. The psalm opens with a pronouncement of blessing.

But here, it's not so much a recipient. It's not referring to this man as a recipient of blessing, like the Hebrew word that is often used for that is Baruch.

Here, the word used, the Hebrew word is *ashray*, and it's more like a description of someone who is in a state of happiness. Someone who is in a state of blessedness.

And the word is even plural. It implies a continuing blessedness. A state, a continued estate of happiness in such a man.

[6:18] And by man, it is referring to all who are of the human race. So we might read it as, happy is the man, happy is the woman, the boy, or the girl.

But it's interesting that a psalm that talks about blessedness first tells us in three successive lines what a blessed man shouldn't do.

Now, if an ad man from Madison Avenue were crafting this, I'm sure they'll say, if you want to sell someone something, don't start by telling them what they mustn't do.

Rather, tell them what they can't do. But God is not in the business of inflating our ego. Rather, like a good father, he wants our happiness.

And how many of you, being good fathers and good mothers, tell your children, only what they can do, but don't set boundaries for them.

[7:24] I know, I know that in the age we live in, it's actually a thing not to say no to your kids because it may hurt them psychologically. And while I don't mean to offend anyone, I'm here to say that such a way is not really practical.

we tell our children what they mustn't do all the time. Whether we use the word no or bend backwards not to use it.

We do so, we set boundaries for our children because we want them to live and not die. I have four boys who will not survive to adulthood if my wife and I don't say no to them.

They're adventurous, they're energetic, but they don't yet have the wisdom not to fall as long into something that might hurt them.

so they need their parents to say no, to set boundaries for their good and for their happiness. In the same way, God, our good, heavenly, loving Father sets boundaries for us.

[8:38] And God is concerned. Here in this psalm, God is actually concerned about your happiness. It might not be in the way you think it should be, but here the psalmist is saying to us, God is concerned with your blessedness, with your happiness.

He created our first parent, after all, Adam and Eve. He created them in a state of happiness. It was their disobedience that brought them, that separated them from that blessed estate that God created them in.

But God, in His mercy, wants to redeem us back into that condition of happiness. happiness. He says to us, He says to us in this psalm, the way to blessedness, to happiness, is not to walk in the counsel of the wicked.

It's not to stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers. Now, this pattern is what is called parallelism in Hebrew poetry.

That basically means that the phrases that I've just read to you, those three phrases, echo each other. While not being exactly identical, they are saying the same thing in different ways.

[10:06] look, for example, in Psalm 2, verse 1. It starts this way. Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?

That's what I mean by the parallelism. Why do the nations conspire? And then in a different way of saying it, in a more deeper, revealing way, why and the peoples plot in vain?

Both lines are saying similar things in different ways. This is what parallelism is. It's actually, I take the point to say that because it's helpful for us to understand that tool in Hebrew poetry as we read the Psalms.

to understand the way in which it is written. So it's useful for us to know as we read the Psalms. But here, in Psalm 1, the Psalmist is not just being redundant.

Or in any of the Psalms, when we see this parallelism, it's not just redundancy. When he says it here, he's saying it, he's saying the same things in more than one way.

[11:09] But he's also expounding on what is said. So we see in verse 1, it's a tri-colon. It's actually three parallel lines of what we mustn't do if we are to be blessed, if we are to be happy.

The three things the blessed man must not do actually reveals to us the progression of sin. Doesn't it? He says, first, he must not walk, nor stand, nor sit.

That's how sin works. Sin doesn't just come couched as evil. That sin doesn't show its truthful color as an affront against an only God.

That it is. But it comes in subtle, subtle, enticing ways. It lures you to walk with it. Then, to leer a little longer, for example, at that woman or that man to entertain in your mind how you can steal or cheat.

Of course, you're not going to get caught, the sin would tell you. But if you were, but if you were to do it, this is how it would go. That's how sin works.

[12 : 35] Then before you know it, you're going from walking with the wicked to standing. And before you know it, you're sitting down. The progression shows a deepening association with evil.

Notice also the progression in the relationship. You're walking first, it goes from walking in council to standing in the way.

Before you know it, you're in the seat. You yourself are in the seat of the scoffers. You've become one with those who sit in derision of God, who sit in derision of God's law, and who sit in derision of God's people.

You deride God's people for saying, thus says the Lord. You read God's word and you laugh at God's word and say, well, you know, you join the scoffers who say, well, the Bible is just a primitive document written, you know, in the dark ages before people even really looked at, you know, any modern civilization.

It's not, it's not, it can't really be interpreted the same way in the 21st century modern age. that's what the scoffers say about God and his word.

[13 : 59] And it all, this all happens gradually, it doesn't happen all at once. Look, for example, at churches who profess to proclaim Jesus Christ, who profess to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, but they've thrown out their fate in the Jesus that's revealed in the pages of Holy Scripture.

They've thrown out what it means that Jesus is atoned for sins. There's no mention of sin, there's no mention of God's just wrath, and there's no mention of repentance.

Those people, those churches or people like that didn't become scoffers overnight. They first walked in the council with the wicked, then they stood amidst the sinners before they took up residence.

among the scoffers. In our Wednesday night Bible study, we've been going through the book of Jude, it's just one chapter, but I'm reminded of what Jude warns the people he wrote to about, to contend for the fate that was once delivered, because there are people who have crept in subtly among them that are compromising this faith.

faith. And that's how the father of lies work. But look here in verse 2, there is another path that's given, that's shown to us.

[15 : 30] There is the path of blessedness is laid out. This blessed man, this happy man, delights in the law of the Lord.

God, he takes pleasure in the law of the Lord. Not just a token appreciation for God's word, but it talks of a longing in his heart for the Torah, for God's law.

And he shows this delight, this longing, by meditating on the Lord day and night. The word to meditate there in the Hebrew actually means to mutter, to mutter, to continually repeat, to muse on something.

And we often think of meditation in the Eastern transcendental way of thinking of it. It just sits silently and it's all in your head. But here, whenever you see meditation in the Old Testament, it implies more of this way of doing it, to continually speak God's word in your heart as you speak it to yourself, to mutter God's word day and night.

That's what is shown in the image that we ought to see there. And I want to ask you, what if you commit to that kind of meditation of God's word during this coming season of Lent?

[17 : 00] I can't think of nothing more worthwhile or more pleasant than to progress in the study of God's word. What would happen if as the people of God, we all commit to that during the season of Lent?

To take up something rather than always letting go of something during Lent. Test God and see if he doesn't replenish you, if you do not truly have a sense of blessedness as you do so.

Let's look further though. Look at the description of what happens to this man, this blessed man, in verse 3. The psalmist says, 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. but the wicked are not so. They are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Now, this description describes the vibrant life of someone who keeps covenant with God, one who faithfully abides by God's law.

[18 : 21] Such a person is like a tree. That's the simile there. This person who is blessed is like this tree.

And what does the tree look like? The tree has life. The tree has productivity, fruitfulness, and health, because it is planted.

It is planted by streams of water. Such a person who is blessed is like that tree.

That's an arborist of God in his dream, isn't it? How can such a tree now yield proper fruit? And what does prosperity, now this is the thing we ought to ask is that, what does prosperity look like for a plant that is well planted like that in streams of water?

It says it, fruit. Yes, it yields fruit. That's what prosperity looks like. Such as a Christian, brothers and sisters, that is planted and tended by God, such a believer also yields fruit in keeping with righteousness.

[19 : 45] righteousness. That's what prosperity looks like in God's economy. And you, this passage, you will hear prosperity gospel peddlers misuse this verse to say that it's about material blessing.

If you, if you abide by God's word, if you meditate on his word, he's going to give you riches And wealth! and all of these things. But look in the, in the, I want to, let's go back to the psalm, what the psalm is.

Someone who does this, who meditates on God's law, is like a tree. Don't forget the example, the image, it actually gives us the simile there.

And the tree that yields fruit. In God's economy, it doesn't have in mind material blessing, but spiritual blessing. God may bless such a man with material wealth, but that is not the thing that is being guaranteed here in this, in this psalm.

What's being guaranteed is that such a man who is so well planted, his roots are, are stretched out, as Jeremiah says, to streams of water, that it is fixed, and it is nourished spiritually by God.

[21 : 06] so that nothing, nothing in the world, nothing that comes along will move it, that tree, and will move that Christian, that believer.

And you may ask, at this point, why isn't material blessing, why can't we say this is about material blessing? Well, remember that I said Psalm 1 is a summary view of the whole book of Psalms.

If you go further into the Psalms, you will see that Psalmist talks about how the righteous do not always prosper materially. Just read Psalm 10.

We read Psalm 10 in our Lunch Bunch group this Thursday. Just read that Psalm. You see there the description of the wicked seeming to prosper, and the innocent, and the righteous suffering. The wicked are actually praying on the innocent and the righteous. So, it doesn't have in view just material blessing, but as you also read through the Psalms, you realize the continual refrain, that even though all of these things are befalling the righteous, they are fixed, they are planted, they are solid, because they are connected to God in the face of all oppositions.

[22 : 46] Their God is there as their head, and as their help, and as their Savior, their Redeemer. And look even in what Jesus says in Luke 6, the Gospel reading today.

Jesus described this state of happiness, of blessedness, and he says that happy are you who are poor, happy are you who are hungry, now, or who weep now, for you shall have the kingdom of God, Jesus says.

You shall be satisfied, you shall laugh, and oh by the way, people will hate you, they will revile you, they will spurn your name as evil, on account of Jesus.

But, rejoice, rejoice, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven.

Jesus might as well be interpreting someone to us in those pages of Matthew 6, of Luke 6, rather.

[24 : 02] The blessedness that is ours, brothers and sisters in Christ, is not of this world. The blessedness that this world offers is going to come to ruin, it is momentary, it is fleeting, but the blessedness that God offers us is eternal, it is the blessedness that is stored in the everlasting

kingdom of God.

And as we are filled with that blessedness, we display it even now in this kingdom, we display the fruit signifying that we are citizens of God's imperishable kingdom.

Here, before us, is the way of righteousness, and it may seem stark and lonely walking this path. It may even invite ridicule.

Scoffers will jare at you and call you backwards for standing on God's word, for making it your delight. But, God says that to us in his words, this is the way to happiness.

This is the way to blessedness. And you may ask, you may ask, what about those many other offerings, the different shortcuts that the devil and the world offers us.

[25 : 25] You may think of that path to respectability in the world, the path that accommodates the world's beliefs in small ways, just a small accommodation.

You may even try to convince yourself that such accommodations is so that you may preach the gospel better, to make the pill go down smoother.

But here, hear the words of prophet Jeremiah, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

We can know it. we can know it. Here, Jeremiah is telling us, you, even you yourself, cannot know your own heart.

Let me tell you what your heart is. It is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. So don't try to accommodate evil, because you are not able to not be tainted by it.

[26 : 36] you will walk, and then you will sit among the scoffers, if you're not careful. But only one person knows the heart.

Verse 10 of Jeremiah, the same chapter 17. Only the Lord knows the heart. Ye alone can search every heart. And here is the reason Psalm 1 shows us the path of wisdom, this is why the path of wisdom is to delight in the law of the Lord, to meditate on his word, because that is the only way the wickedness of your heart and my heart can be revealed to us.

It is by meditating on God's word. God reveals our fallenness, but it also gives us words of comfort, words of salvation.

salvation. It calls us to turn to him who alone can save and deliver us. God's word is clear. There are only two paths, and there are only two kinds of people.

The wicked, no matter how they seem to our eyes, no matter how they seem prosperous in the world, celebrating and enjoying life, to God, the psalmist says, the wicked are like chaff that the wind drives away.

[28 : 07] Jeremiah was even more stark in his description. The wicked are those who trust it in the flesh. How do you know the wicked from the righteous? The wicked are those who trust in the flesh, who trust in their own strength, who turn their heart away from the Lord?

That is what it means to be wicked in God's eyes. And Jeremiah paints a similar picture for those people.

Instead of chaff in someone, such people, Jeremiah says, are like shrubs in the desert. Have you ever seen a shrub in a desert? Have you ever seen a tumbleweed just blowing in the open desert? No life. Just kindle for fire. That's the description of the wicked. Whatever we might think of them, whenever we see them prospering, we might look along with the psalmist in Psalm 37 and say, why are the wicked prospering?

Before God, they are like chaff, like tumbleweed. Again, see the contrast in imagery there. But the righteous person, look at the description, the righteous person, who is the righteous person?

[29 : 27] the righteous person is the person who trusts in the Lord. And to trust in the Lord is to cast your whole self, all of who you are, into the arms of God.

Not to put any stock in your own heart. Not to put any measure of confidence in your own heart, but to trust God's word rather than your way of thinking, your way of doing things, to be ruled, to sit under God's word, to be ruled by his way and his word.

That is what the righteous looks like in God's economy. It's such a person, such a person is like a tree planted by water, whose roots, Jeremiah tells us, are nourished by streams of living water. trouble will come. The heat of this life will assail both the righteous and the wicked.

The consequences of living in a falling world comes upon both kinds of people, but only those who trust in the Lord will not be anxious. The Bible tells us, only those who trust in the Lord will not be afraid because he or she is anchored to Jesus Christ.

[30:51] God is the source of such a person. The Lord sustains such a person, even in the face of the world's heat, even in the face of drought. I want to call your attention to the fact that this song is written to those who are in the church, who are in God's covenant people.

It's not written to the world out there. All of the psalms are meant to be used in the context of worship by God's people.

So this psalm is written to us, Christians. It is a prayer. It's also a wisdom psalm. That it means that it should order the way we live.

It gives us a paradigm for how we live as Christians. God's you read it, as you read this psalm, it is not for you to measure yourself against those who don't know Jesus and to congratulate them and say, well, I'm better off than those people.

Thank God I'm saved. And that's not what the point of this psalm is. Rather, it is actually written so that we may examine our own art. do you truly trust in the Lord?

[32:08] The psalmist is telling us here. Have you all-heartedly given yourself to him? Are you edging your bent? Are you putting stock in the arms of your own flesh?

Have you entrusted yourself, body and soul, to Jesus Christ? That's what this question is asking us. And if you haven't, if you haven't done that, if you haven't entrusted yourself fully to Jesus, today is the day.

Now is the hour to come to Jesus. He waits with open arms to welcome you home. He will plant you, God says, by streams of living water.

He will nourish you and keep you. there's other things I want us to see. Maybe you've trusted in God. Maybe you are planted by streams of living water.

But you read these songs, and you read the passage in Jeremiah 17, and you read Jesus' words in Luke, and you're going through hard times currently.

[33:17] You're facing the hardness of this life. You're the poor that Jesus refers to. You're weeping now. You're hungry now. You're going through a dark night of the soul.

You love the Lord, but you feel beseeched on every side. You're battling the world. You're battling the flesh. You're battling the devil. I want you to eat the word of the psalmist here.

Go back to your Lord. Go back to his word. Delight and meditate on his word. That is the call of the psalmist to us.

Even in the face of opposition, we have the means by which we will be nourished and we can stand in the face of opposition. God's word. It is the light to our path.

And as we read this psalm through the lens of the New Testament, we also see Jesus. He's the truly righteous one, isn't he? He's the one who perfectly delights in God's laws and meditates on it.

[34:22] He perfectly kept the law and went to the cross as the atoning sacrifice. So if you, like me, know you do not always delight in the law of the Lord, you know you are weak and feeble, look to Jesus.

That's what the psalmist is telling us as we read this through the lens of the New Testament. Don't trust in your arms of flesh for strength. Don't trust in your works to present you before God.

Look to Jesus. He is the anchor. He is the living water that does not run dry. He is the one who promises to continually refresh you and because he is risen, that's the passage of the, that's what we read in 1 Corinthians, because he is risen, because he lives, because we believe this as believers and followers of Jesus Christ.

the resurrection power of our Lord Jesus, the power to raise them from the dead is available for you and I, Paul tells us in Ephesians.

And he is promised because he is risen, he is promised to bring you through this life with all the pain that is in it, with all the tragedies and sorrows of this life, he is promised to bring you through, through it all, into his kingdom.

[35:52] this is our confidence, this is why we have hope in the face of all the world can throw at us. And although the wicked will not stand in the judgment, the psalmist tells us in the end here, the wicked will not stand in the judgment or sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

sinners, you will have trusted in Jesus Christ, will have committed your whole self to him. When that day comes, when your race is complete, you will say with all the other saints in Christ, yet not I, but through Christ in me.

this is the promise of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is what we stand on on that day of judgment. We stand in his righteousness alone, because Jesus is the way.

He is that path of those who are righteous. I call on you, I beseech you, brothers and sisters, let us follow him.

Nothing else the word offers can compare to the joy and happiness that he alone gives. Let us pray. Lord, we acknowledge that our heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, but you, Lord, such the heart.

[37:34] You give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings. And we also acknowledge that we have no works to measure up to appease you, Lord, but we rest fully, completely, wholeheartedly on our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

We rest on his finished work. We come before you in Christ, and because he is accomplished for us that which we cannot, because he is atoned for our sins before God's just wrath.

We stand righteous before you, O God. We stand on your promises. We stand in your word. So help us, Lord, we pray, to continue to stand firm.

Help us, Lord, not to look to the left or the right. Help us, Lord, not to go the way of the wicked, not to even walk with them, or stand amongst them, or sit in their seat.

But by the power of the Holy Spirit, Lord, guard our hearts and minds to stand upon your word, to meditate upon your word, to look to Jesus Christ, the perfecter and finisher of our faith, to look to him, our elder brother, who is there in heaven, seated at the right hand of God, knowing that the same resurrection power is ours, and that one day he will present us blameless and righteous before God the Father.

[39:08] We pray this in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.