

The Truly Blessed

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank you for the book of Psalms. Thank you for this great gift that you've given us. Father, we pray in these next five weeks or so as we look at these first five Psalms, that you would speak to us, comfort, encourage, strengthen us, rebuke us, correct us, train us in righteousness.

And Father, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, it was the end of the Second World War, and there was a teenage German soldier who found himself in a British prisoner of war camp.

The friends who surrounded him gradually began losing their will to live. But there was a chaplain. He was seeking to do the best that he could. He wanted to give some succor to these young men. And he began distributing the scriptures to them. And the version that he gave them is one that perhaps some of you have come across. Gideon distributes it quite often. The version he gave them was a New Testament with the book of Psalms attached.

And the young man was initially unimpressed, actually, but he then began to read. And as he read, he found himself captured by the Psalms. They spoke to him out of the depths, as it were.

[1 : 10] And they brought him to God. And this young man went on to become one of the most influential German systematic theologians in the last third of the 20th century. Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, preached his way through the Psalms.

His sermons are captured in a series of books called The Treasury of David. And they are replete with stories of those Christians who have been blessed by the Psalms. You see, friends, the Psalms is both the prayer book and the hymn book of the church.

They are God's record of what people have said to God. They recount how God's people have struggled with God. They tell of their questions, the questions that people have of God and to God, of their praise of God, their exaltation of God, their pain of life lived before God, their love of God, their certainties about God, their doubts about God, their feelings about life and about other humans, their desires, their doubts.

And as such, you see, I think the Psalms speaks to us profoundly. They, I think the Psalms make it possible for us to say things that otherwise we would be afraid to say.

They give us voice to the things that scream out for our hearts from our hearts. And they tell us that these things are OK to say. Others have said them before us. You can say them as well.

[2 : 32] God has inscribed them in his book. It must be OK. He's given us permission to echo them in our hearts and voice them on our lips. And you see, so it is that the book of Psalms, the words of the book of Psalms have come to God's people in the strangest of places.

They have slipped out on sick beds. They have been recalled in dungeons. They have been remembered on scaffolds. They have been present in lonely persecution.

They have been cited over by criminals. They have been cited over criminals. They have brought comfort to saints. Friends, the Psalms are a majestic gift of God.

A sucker to his saints. A garden in which they can both scream and find solitude. I love the Psalms. For 30 years, that has been part of my daily reading of Scripture.

If I read nothing else in the day, my goal is to read a Psalm. And timeless times, I've found myself confronted, comforted, oriented, disoriented, realigned and readjusted.

[3 : 44] The Psalms are just wonderful. I've found echoes of my pain. As I felt God's absence, I've found others have felt it as well. I've found a voice for my praise.

I've been filled with passion. I've turned to the Holy One. I've found words to use with my God. The Psalms are just magnificent. The Psalms are great.

And the writers of the New Testament knew this, you see. They knew the magic of the Psalms. And that's why they quoted them. They alluded to them endlessly. And that's why Paul says to the Ephesian Christians, speak to one another with Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

And that's why he urged the Colossian Christians with these words. Let the message of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through Psalms and hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Friends, in this new year, in this month of January of this new year, we're going to take a journey through the first five of these Psalms. And my hope and my prayer is that as we do, God might come near to us.

[4 : 54] He might comfort us and strengthen us. He might draw us to his son. He might speak to us about himself and our life before him. May we learn how to speak to God as these Psalms speak for us to him.

And may he give us a voice in our lives as individuals and also as God's gathered people. So with that said, I wonder if I might give you the briefest introduction to the Psalter, the book of Psalms. I want you to open your Bibles with me. So easy to find the book of Psalms. You just open it in the middle and there it is. OK, so Psalms, I won't give you a page number. You can find it for yourself. Middle of the Bible.

And I want you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 1. Now, I want you to notice something about Psalm 1. It has a little heading over it. Look at the words. It says book 1.

Now, that is not something that, like the translators of our Bible often want to do, something they've helpfully added in. And no, although it's not part of the standard Hebrew text of the Psalms, it does go back a long, long way.

[5 : 56] It is strongly attested in ancient Jewish literature. According to the Talmud, some Hebrew reflections on the Bible, the division into five books matches the five books of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, what we call the Pentateuch.

The Psalter is divided into five books, just as the Torah is divided into five books. Let me show you. Look at Psalm 42. Psalm 42.

And you'll see it's the beginning of book 2. And if you were to keep going, Psalm 73 would be the beginning of book 3.

Psalm 90 would be the beginning of book 4. And finally, Psalm 107 would be the beginning of book 5. Now, as we'll see in the weeks ahead, these books are not just random collections, you see. They're sewn together in this fine tapestry. Together, they are wonderfully and intricately integrated. Five books of Psalms.

[7 : 03] Five books of the Torah capture the story of God among his people. You see, the first five books of the Bible, they tell us what God has done in his world among his people. Well, what the five books of the Psalms do is they capture what God's people say back to this God.

One is what God has done for his people. The Torah, the Pentateuch, the Psalms are what God's people say back to him. And they say all sorts of things.

But there's one more thing that we can say before we move on to our psalm for today. And this one more thing is that the whole of the Psalter has two important bookends to it. That is, Psalm 1 stands as a heading and an introduction to the whole.

Psalm 150 is a fitting conclusion to the whole. Today, we're going to look at Psalm 1, this fitting introduction to the whole. It will guide your whole reading of the book of Psalms.

So, open your Bible, Psalm 1. Now, before we look at the detail, I wonder if I can give you one piece of advice. The advice is this. There are two ways to read the Psalms. First, there's this sort of casual reading of the Psalms, which is good.

[8 : 08] You know, that reading you do in your daily reading of Scripture. Then there's a second way. The second way is to read the Psalms seriously and deeply. Well, for that more casual reading of the Psalms, I think you might use the NIV translation, such as we do here at church.

However, if you want to really seriously study the Psalms, you need and you don't know Hebrew, then I'd recommend a more literal translation of the Bible. The ancient King James Version is good. The New American Standard. The English Standard Version. They would be good versions to use to read the Psalms a little more seriously. They're much more concerned to give a more literal equivalence to the Hebrew words and the way they're ordered.

Now, one of the risks of using one of these more literal translations is they keep using, they keep the non-inclusive language of the original. So, if that offends you, you need to be aware of that. But I think it's worth labouring at it. I think they will show us things that we miss out on otherwise. Anyway, let's look at Psalm 1 together. Have it there in front of you. I want you to take a quick run through it.

[9:12] But this Psalm talks to various groups of people or about various groups of people and talks about various approaches to life. The most important question to ask, though, and ask of this Psalm is who is the main player in this Psalm?

Because that will tell us who the main player in the drama of life is. And Psalm 1 is clear, isn't it? It is the Lord. Look at verse 6. It is the Lord who watches over everything.

And look at verse 2. It is the Lord who sets the agenda for humans by giving instructions in his law. It is he who rewards. It is he who punishes.

So, that's the first truth of the Psalm. Not startling, but true. The Lord is the main player in this Psalm. The Lord is the main player in the drama of life.

Now, let me say that this truth is incredibly hard for us to grasp. You see, the very first pages of the Torah, the law, the Pentateuch, and the very first pages of these first five books of the Bible, they tell us that humans were created good.

[10:16] God created humans good and put them in a good world. And then we're told that humans distorted how God created them. Genesis 2 and 3 tell us that at the very core of our being as human beings is a deep-seated orientation toward oneself and away from God.

Instead of placing God as the main player in the drama of our lives in our existence, we place ourselves at the center. We make ourselves the center of our own existence just like Adam and Eve did.

We make ourselves the determiner of what is right and wrong for ourselves. We act as judges, say, God, I know better than you. We take responsibility for ourselves, act independently.

We act as though God were not the main player of life. And to us, this Psalm and the whole of Scripture says, no, no, do not do this. God says it to us in this Psalm and the rest of Scripture.

No, I made you. I own you. I gave you instructions. I will call you to account. I will count you responsible. I began your life when I wanted and I will bring it to an end when I choose.

[11:27] You cannot ignore me. Life is lived before me and within the boundaries I have given you. I watch over it. I watch over you. I am the main player in your existence, whether you recognize it or not.

Friends, please hear this from this Psalm. God is the main player in the drama of life. Jesus agrees with this. In his early teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, he makes this abundantly clear. He talks about God who sees what is done in secret places, a God who rewards and a God who punishes and a God who knows the heart and what consumes it.

Friends, that's the truth of both Old and New Testaments together. There is a God who watches. He is the main player of in life, a God around whom life is to be oriented.

And if it's not, he will orient himself around it. The second thing to notice about the Psalm is that it highlights that there are two sorts of people in God's world. Look at verse six.

The first sort of person is the righteous person. They have only one name in the Psalm, the righteous one. However, their actions are described in various places. Can you see it? In verse one, they are those who do not walk in step with the wicked.

[12:38] That is, they don't stand in the way that sinners take and nor do they sit in the company of the unrighteous. Instead, these people have another focus in life. Look at verse two.

They have a delight and their delight is in the law, in the Torah. That is the instruction of God. They are those who meditate upon God's instruction day and night. That's the first group of people in God's world.

People who orient themselves around God's revelation of himself and who have deep roots into God's revealed will. Now look at verse four. The second group of people are named.

They are the wicked. Now they've got actually various names throughout this Psalm. Verse one, four, five and six. They are simply that the wicked. In verses one and five, they are sinners.

In verse one, they are mockers. Verse one, you see, tells us clearly and starkly this second truth. It's an important truth from God. And that second truth from God is this.

[13 : 37] In the end, there are only two sorts of people in the world. Only two. The righteous and the wicked. There are those who are rightly related to God.

And there are those who are not rightly related to him. And those not rightly related to God are out of relationship with him. Friends, this is the way Jesus speaks himself, isn't it?

You know, Jesus just echoes this. Do you remember the story in Matthew 25? It's a future judgment day. And God's got before him the whole world and he divides them up into sheep and goats.

All the nations are gathered there. And he'll just separate them out from each other. Countless other parables and teachings of Jesus and the apostles confirm this. At the judgment on the last day, God, the creator of life, will measure up all people in all time and simply divide them up.

And there'll be one sort of person on one side. And there'll be another sort of person on the other side. And in the end, there are just two of two sorts of people. So truth number one, the Lord is the main player in the drama of life.

[14 : 46] Truth number two, there are only two sorts of people in this world, according to God. Let's see the character and the means of living of those two groups of people. And let's start with the righteous and have a look at them.

Verse six tells us that the Lord watches over the way of the righteous. But what is their way? What does their life look like? Well, it can be defined negatively and positively.

Negatively, it's outlined in verse one. Can you see it there? They don't follow or walk in the step of the wicked. They don't stand in the way that sinners take. They don't sit in the company of mockers. Now, most translations notice the action words used in the original language. And they are walk, sit and stand. Most literal translations notice walk, sit.

Stand or walk, stand and sit. And do you notice what happens to the righteous? They don't walk.

They don't stand. They don't sit.

[15 : 46] And the language gets stronger as you go along. You see, imagine the situation. You are. What's happening here is. Here are the wicked, however they ever find. And you're walking along with them.

After a while, you get really interested. So you stop and you stand and you talk to them. And then you get really interested. And you sit down with them. Can you see the progress?

You are gradually. You are gradually becoming more entrenched in the ways of the wicked until finally you are stationary there. You see, God's people don't do that.

Instead, they listen to God's instruction. Instead of walking, sitting, standing, listening to the advice and so on of the wicked, they soak themselves in the word of the Lord, in the law of the Lord, the instruction of the Lord.

In other words, the righteous person is the person who lives in dependence upon God's instruction. The wicked person lives independently from it, cuts himself loose from it, cuts herself loose from it.

[16 : 53] They live independently, on their own, dependent upon human advice, not godly advice, not God's advice. They're like Adam and Eve, their spiritual predecessors.

So that's the third truth of this psalm. The righteous are those who depend upon God for advice, while the wicked, well, they just continue to act independently from God and trust in themselves and other ungodly people.

Now, when you get to the New Testament, we see this built on a little bit. See, the New Testament tells us that God's word is found in a particular place. God has given his advice and the advice is in a person, the person of Jesus Christ.

And this person, Jesus, comes into the world. He dies because of the wickedness and independence of humans. He dies in their place, in our place. And in and through Jesus, the word of God, God gives his advice and his instruction.

And that instruction is to trust in the Lord by trusting in Jesus. By trusting in Jesus to forgive and make us righteous. Listen to Jesus, John 3, 36.

[18 : 02] Whoever believes in the son has eternal life. But whoever rejects the son will not see life for God's wrath remains on them.

Can you see what's being said? God's view of us is determined by how we view Jesus. If we believe in Jesus, we're not condemned. If we believe in Jesus, we've accepted God's great word. If we believe in him, if we've trusted in him, God views us as righteous. So what do you think in the modern day would be the equivalent to never walking in step with the wicked?

Never standing in the way that sinners take. Never sitting in the company of the mockers. Well, here's what I think it means. It means refusing to listen to those who tell you that Jesus is not important.

It is refusing to let people drag you away from belief in who Jesus is and what he's done. It's refusing to allow the dominant force in your thoughts, your ideas, your philosophies to be cut loose from God and his word about Jesus.

[19 : 08] Now, let me tell you that this is an increasingly common disposition in our contemporary world. People around the world are deserting, at least people from our perspective, that is from largely from our cultural background.

People are just throwing God aside. You see, God's word is clear to us. We must avoid throwing him on the scrap heap.

We must avoid imbibing and becoming absorbed in a wrong way of thinking. The right way of thinking is a way of thinking oriented around God and his existence and his presence.

We've now noticed three things, haven't we? First, most important thing is to learn that life is lived before God. He's the main player in the drama of life.

Two. God sees two groups of people. There are the righteous and the wicked. Three. There are two orientations of those two groups. The first orientate themselves, orient themselves around God and his word.

[20 : 11] The others orient themselves around their own human advice and counsel. But this psalm then adds another matter. It talks about the fate of each of those groups. I want you to look at verse three.

Verse three in Psalm one. It talks about the righteous. And it says that person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever they do prospers. I love the pictures in the earlier display. You must have seen them as well. You must have perhaps driven out in the outback of Australia and see seen trees which had no source of water.

And then, you know, you've seen those magnificent trees that have found a way to grow in the middle of a creek. And everything else around them is dying. But these trees who are in the creek bed are just flourishing.

That's what's being talked about here, you see. The verse could be translated even more strongly. It could be translated like this. He becomes like a tree planted by streams of water. Or even as the English Standard Version translates it, he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water.

[21 : 24] Friends, that is the fate of the righteous. Firmly planted, well watered, fruitful, prosperous, secure. But look at the fate of the wicked, verses four and five. The wicked are not firmly planted, not well watered, and will not be fruitful.

They will be rather like chaff that the wind drives away. They do not, will not stand in the judgment. That is, they'll have no feet to stand on in the day that judgment comes.

They'll not be in the assembly or company of the righteous. They'll not be secure and safe like the righteous will be. Can you hear what this psalm is saying? It's urging us, it's urging us to notice the fate of the future of the righteous and the wicked.

It's urging us to light ourselves up with the righteous. For they'll be blessed in God's future day of judgment. They will be intensely happy. They will be people of immense good fortune. They will be blessed.

I wonder if you can hear this truth of the psalm. This truth is that success in life is measured by God who oversees life and the future. God is the main player in this drama of life.

[22 : 31] He will also oversee the future of it. And Jesus knew this. He makes it clear through his teaching. He talks about gates that lead to life and gate that leads to death.

He talks about eternal life and the state of weeping and gnashing of teeth. And he talks about judgment by God on the last day. But Jesus also assures those who have accepted his word, accepted the gospel, that they'll now be washed on the last day rather than washed away.

They will stand. You see, they will be prosperous. Listen to Matthew 7, 24. Jesus says, look, everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and

does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who builds his house on the sand. And the rain comes, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house. And it fell with a great crash. Friends, the things we have heard from this psalm are true. They're from God's Old Testament word.

[23 : 44] They're endorsed by Jesus in his own teaching in the first in the Sermon on the Mount, the earliest amongst the earliest teaching he gives. They'll be confirmed in the judgment on the last day. They are true and you can rely on them.

This is God's word and it can be trusted. So please, friends, please listen to me. Don't rely on contrary advice. Rely on advice from God.

It is true and dependable. It's God's word and it can be trusted. Friends, if this psalm is an introduction to the Psalter, I wonder what we've learned about reading the rest of the psalms that follow.

Well, let me suggest some things first. First, we've learned that God's instructions about life are mediated through scripture. For us in the New Testament, we learn that this points us toward this scripture, points us toward Jesus.

And we've found that reading scripture as pointing toward Jesus will result in life. Second, we've found that meditating on scripture is the source of life and the way to a prosperous future with God.

[24 : 47] So, you see, as we read the Psalms, we shouldn't just skim across the surface, friends. We should meditate deeply on them and let them seep into our lives. And such meditations will result in life and fullness before God.

But there's a third thing to learn. Remember that the book of Psalms is the prayer book of ancient Israel. And do you notice what the compilers of the Psalter are saying?

They're saying right up here in Psalm number one. Don't just jump in. Pray. Meditate. Let these things go round and round.

Ruminates upon them. Pray in the light of scripture. Pray in the light of God's revelation of himself.

And for us Christians, pray in the light of God's revelation in Jesus. Friends, you see, we people are people of God's word.

We, God's people, are people of his word. Our prayers are to be informed and transformed by God's written word and God's word incarnate in his son.

[25 : 48] So, I want to close today just with this introduction to Psalm one with an invitation. I wonder if you'll join me and read the Psalms regularly. You might even like to try and read a Psalm daily.

It's not a hard thing to do. You know, you could read it before you go to bed at night. But, these days, we've got it on your phone wherever you go. No. Whenever you have that special cup of coffee, read a Psalm.

Over breakfast, over lunch. And let the Psalms soak deep into your lives. So, I wonder if you'll start reading a Psalm regularly with me. And if you do, I'd love to hear about it every now and then.

If you've found something that you've never found before, come and tell me. I'd love to hear what you find in the Psalms. And how they've affected the way that you live. Because, friends, they will.

You read the Psalms. They will affect you. You'll find things that they say that you've never said yourself. And somehow you'll have courage to say them. Or you'll find things you wish someone had said to you that has never been said to you.

[26 : 56] And you say, yep, I needed that. Time and time again, I've found in my life that the Psalms have come to me in my situation in life. And God has said to me, you needed that, didn't you?

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that the Psalms record that people like us have lived before you before.

That the things that we feel they have felt before us. Thank you that you've inscribed them in your word. Father, we pray that you'd help us to read the Psalms.

And please be at work in us by your spirit. That we might hear your word to us. And find words to say back to you. Father, we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.