

Two Ways

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Preacher: Paul Dudley

- [0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 20th of January 2002. The preacher is Paul Dudley.
- His sermon is entitled Two Ways and is based on Psalm 1. Thank you AC for your excitement about me being here.
- I'm feeling a little nervous and I also was reflecting during this week. I was sort of only feeling a little bit nervous now but I was thinking I really want to be successful.
- I want this sermon to be fantastic. So at the end as I'm walking out people are going to go, that was fantastic. We can see Paul didn't just employ you for your good looks.
- I've been a little bit worried about this you see. See I've been told that Paul is very good at hiring someone that compliments him and I've seen how good a preacher he is.
- [1 : 11] I'm not sure what it says about me. But anyhow, I want to be prosperous. I want to be successful. This is my very first sermon of my new career being a minister.
- I'm not quite there yet but you'll be pleased to know that I've actually passed my exams. Again, I was waiting for eager anticipation for this bit of form that would tell me how my results.
- It's my transcript here and down the bottom, first class honours. Well, not really. That's what I should have said. I mean, I'm a great student.
- Well, okay, I didn't quite get a credit average. It's just a pass. But I'm actually allowed to be here now. To your great relief, I guess. I don't have to go back and do the exams again.
- I think the truth is we all really want to be successful, don't we? We want to be prosperous. We want to be a great business person so that we earn lots and lots of money, have a great house, have a lovely car sitting in the driveway.
- [2 : 15] We want to be prosperous parents, successful parents, really, really good. Fantastic. Know all the right answers, got all the right things.
- Job, sport, I mean marriage, sport. Perhaps you want to be a successful sports person. I love sport. I'm glad I've come down to a state that loves sport as much as I do.
- In fact, I'm glad I've come to a state that has some successful teams as well. It's been a little hard barracking for the Swans, the Kings. It's been a little tough the last couple of years.
- But don't we want to be successful in our sport as well for those who are into sport or school? We want to be great. We want to get a great mark. We're going to be successful. It's going to be fantastic.
- Well, tonight we're going to be looking at what does it mean to be a prosperous and successful person in terms of what the Bible has to say. What does it mean to be successful and prosperous?
- [3 : 13] So, we're going to be looking at that. The person who is to be envied, to be admired, the blessed one. But before we start looking at Psalm 1, why don't I pray?

Father, we do indeed thank you for your word that you teach us, that you have not left us in the dark. We pray now that you will help me to speak clearly from your word, that your spirit will be giving me the right words to say and that you'll give us ears to hear and to obey.

We pray this in your son's name. Amen. When Paul called me up end of last year when he was trying to organise the sermon roster, which was unheard of, can I just say, in my church where I was, but for a three-month roster or a six-month roster, it was pretty impressive.

I was quite impressed by this. He asked me what I wanted to preach on. It would be just a one-off and I thought, well, I've got this minister friend of mine who I really like and what he does in off-series, he actually starts preaching through the Psalms.

So, he's working through, I think he's only up to about, I think it's around 30. I couldn't be sure about that. But he's been working slowly through them. Whenever he's finished a sermon series, he jumps back into Psalms.

[4 : 25] And so, I thought, here I am, starting a new job, starting my role as a minister. I thought, well, let's start Psalm 1. And it actually fits in quite well and I think it's going to be, has been greatly, a great benefit to me this week as I think about starting this job.

So, let's have a look at the Psalms, Psalm 1. It would be good if you had it open in front of you as we're working through this. Now, the Psalms are great. They've been used for a very, very long time.

They were put together as a book, as a collection of lots of these individual Psalms. It was put together as a book sometime in the Second Temple period. So, prior to Christ, after they've come back from exile and it's been put together with all these different Psalms.

And we see some there from Moses, some from David and they've all been put there. And we have Psalm 1 right at the very beginning. I actually didn't study Hebrew but these are Hebrew poetry.

And I'm actually a bit of a Philistine in terms of poetry as well. But I thought I'd still give it a go going into the Psalm. So, you'll have to bear with my lack of knowledge in these areas.

[5 : 37] Well, my, yes, anyhow, we'll keep on going. So, let's have a look at the Psalm. The Psalm is actually divided into three different sections that we're going to look at tonight. The first section is verses 1, 2 and 3.

And there we see what a prosperous person looks like as a negative and a positive description about it. And then it describes this person as a tree, likens it to a tree beside water.

Then the second part is verse 4 and 5 where we look at those who aren't prosperous, the wicked. We're going to have a look at them. And then finally we're going to have the last section which is like a bit of a summary of the whole what that brings it together in verse 6 and gives us the reason why one is prosperous and one is not.

So, this contrasting that the Psalm does here between the prosperous person and the wicked person is actually a great tool in highlighting things. I don't know if you've ever gone to get a wedding ring for your, or like an engagement ring, but if you go there to get a ring, actually the drawer will sort of pull out a black cloth and lay it on the top of the bench and then he'll pull out the rings and put the rings on the black cloth.

That way you can see the contrast. You'll see this brilliant diamond and you've got the black background to be able to see it. Or sometimes it's red but there's this contrast. Well, we're going to be looking at this contrast here, verses 1, 2 and 3 and 4 and 5 that the Psalmists use to try and help us see what a prosperous person looks like.

[7 : 07] Well, let's look at verses 1, 2 and 3. The description of the blessed person. First of all, verse 1 looks at what the prosperous person is not.

It starts by giving a negative description of this person. So, it says, Well, happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked. Or the path that sinners tread, or the seat that sit in the seat of scoffers.

Well, happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked. The world has been great at giving advice, wicked advice. Our generation is no exception. All sorts of mottos that come at us.

If it feels good, just do it. We're not here for a long time but a good time. Lots of advice that the world will throw at us. Well, the Jews of their day would have had advice thrown at them, the wicked advice.

And Psalms just saying here, Happy are those who do not listen to this advice, the advice of wicked. Or, take the path sinners tread.

[8 : 15] Don't go the way of the sinner. They don't go worshipping idols, or get involved in sexual immorality, or involved in dishonest gain. Happy is the person who doesn't do that.

And then finally, the psalmist describes here that the prosperous person, the one who is successful, is the person who doesn't sit in the seat of scoffers. He doesn't adopt that most fatal of attitudes, of scoffing at people.

If you were here during the week and heard the talk on James, just the power of the tongue. So powerful. A simple spark destroying a whole fire.

The tongue destroying. Very, very powerful. The psalmist starts with this negative. The prosperous person, the happy person, he's not those.

He doesn't listen to the advice of the wicked. He doesn't take the path of the wicked and he doesn't scoff. Then he gives the positive in verse 2.

[9 : 16] But their delight is in the law of the Lord. On his law they meditate day and night. The prosperous person, the truly prosperous person, the person who is happy, he meditates on God's law.

He listens to God's instructions, guidance from the Creator, the one who's shaped the world. He listens to him. He meditates over it.

He pours over it. Now, this saying, meditate day and night, there's not a literal every moment of the day, you know, reading through, just continually reading through it.

Don't worry about eating, just keep reading. Don't worry about doing the gardening or anything like that. It would be a great excuse for me, sorry dear, I can't do the gardening at the moment. I have to read my Bible day and night.

No, it's not literal. What I think the psalmist is saying here is, is that they are to meditate day and night. It's this, knowing what God's will is and living in accordance with it all the time.

[10 : 20] Knowing what God's will is and living in accordance with it. It's yielding to God's will. It's knowing it and obeying it. It's a delight to them.

Pure delight. Because it recognises that God is sovereign in all things. He knows what is best. He sits humbly underneath God, underneath his word. This beginning actually sounds very much like the words that were given to Joshua.

I mean, yeah, Joshua. In Joshua chapter 1 verse 8. If you want to look that up you can, but you don't have to. It's in page 169. Joshua is about to enter the promised land with the people.

Moses has been left behind and they're about to go into the promised land and God gives these instructions starting in verse 6. Be strong and courageous. You shall put these people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.

Only be strong and very courageous. Being careful to accept in accordance with all the law my servant Moses commended you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left so that you may be successful wherever you go.

- [11 : 32] This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. You shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it for then you shall make your way prosperous and then you shall be successful.

Here's the words giving to Joshua from God that if you want to be successful, you want to be prosperous in getting to this land, meditate day and night on my word. Listen to what my will is and obey it.

Well, there's the prosperous person. The faithful Jew is to be a person who does not take the advice of the wicked, not tread in the path of sinners or scoff, does not scoff but delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night.

And then we have this beautiful picture of a tree. They are like a tree planted by streams of water which yield their fruit in season and their leaves do not wither. For those who were here last week, you would have heard that I grew up on a farm and we had this most magnificent laurelberry tree.

You've probably never heard of a laurelberry tree but it has these little very dark purple fruit with a very large seed in the middle of it.

- [12 : 57] And it was huge but it was right beside our dam and it was the most fantastic tree to grow up. We used to have cubbies in there. I'd be climbing all around it and it was just fantastic.

You could go right up to the very top of it. But it didn't matter whether it was in the middle of a drought or not. This tree always produced fruit because it was right beside the dam where it could be fed by the water.

It was a fantastic picture. Well, the psalmist is saying that the person who is prosperous, the person who meditates on God's word, this person is like a tree beside the stream, always being nourished, always being cared for, producing fruit which yield fruit in season and their leaves do not wither.

When we moved to this farm, we also had a small orchard on the side of the hill quite away from the dam and when the drought hit, it just killed the whole orchard. We just could not supply the water to it.

Those who are prosperous, those who meditate on God's word, who obey his will, they don't dry up, they don't wither. Well, we come to the end of looking at the prosperous person.

- [14 : 23] Then we come to the negative part. It's like an abrupt change. It's this jarring note we come up against. The wicked are not so. They are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Every summer I used to travel out to the big farms. They're huge great farms out near Orange. I used to help with the harvesting and the harvester would go along and it'd take all the grain and then it'd spit out the back all the chaff, all the husks, all the stuff that wasn't needed from the wheat, the grain of wheat.

The grain was held but all the other stuff was blown out the back which just caused me so many problems because I was a person who had bad hay fever. But it was useless.

Chaff was useless. It had no worth whatsoever. It just gets blown around. So the wicked, they're like chaff. The wind just drives them away.

Have you noticed the two absolutes that we have here?

- [15 : 31] It's not three or four or five. There's only really two paths. There is the path of the happy and the path of the wicked. One leads to life, the other to doom.

This is actually a very fitting psalm to be placed at the head of the psalms. The psalms are used in worship in the temple and so they would come together and they'd be worshipping God.

But here at the very beginning is a very stark reminder that this is not something that you can just do on a Sabbath. This is not something that you can take lightly. You need to be meditating on God, on His Word, day and day and night, listening to Him, obeying Him.

It's a great psalm to have as the signpost, as a gateway to the psalms. Well, it'll be very easy at this point to say, well, for us here now, it's very easy that you want to be prosperous, don't accept the world's advice.

Be a part of its ways and don't scoff. But go and meditate on God's Word and you'll be prosperous. I could finish here now and sit down and tell you, go and do it.

[16 : 49] But just like the Jew and myself and those here will realise it's not that easy. We can't do this perfectly. We cannot fulfil the demands that it has in here.

We cannot fulfil its demands. The reality is is that we cannot meet, we cannot avoid the advice. We just have these itching ears that want to listen to what the advice tells us.

We want to scoff. We find it hard to obey God's will. At our core, we are sinful. Verse 6 tells us there, for us, the way of the wicked will perish.

Beginning of verse 6, for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous. We are not righteous. Or are we?

See, the faithful Jew reading this psalm recognised that he was not righteous. He could not feel the full demands of the law. And so he would throw himself upon the mercy of God and trust that one day God would fix this problem.

[18 : 04] That the law would be written on his heart. Well, God did fix this problem. And that person was Jesus. You see, the psalm describes Jesus.

Let's have a look at it again. It foreshadows Jesus. Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked. Jesus didn't follow the advice of the wicked. Or take the path that the sinners tread.

Or sit in the suit of scoffers. But their delight is in the law of the Lord. Christ's delight was in the law of the Lord. He fulfilled God's will even to death on a cross.

They are like trees planted by streams of water which yield their fruit in season and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do they prosper. The wicked are not so but they are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in judgment nor sinners in the congregation of righteous. The Lord watches over the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish. It foreshadows the righteous one Christ.

[19 : 09] He is the one that has fulfilled this. The great privilege is if we trust in Christ we are united to Him.

We are united to Him. This is where true prosperity is found. Where the true successful person is. You see Christ took me and all my rags.

I want to boast in all the things that I have at home. You know all the trophies and you know the great things that I have done but they are all rags. Absolute rags.

Yet I have been made rich through Christ. In Philippians Paul writes this Philippians chapter 3 verse 7 They have Ming add of my own that comes from the law but one that comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God based on faith.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death. If somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Paul regarded all that he did as rags that he may know Christ.

[20 : 51] The question I had at the beginning is do you want to be successful and prosperous? If you want to be successful and prosperous be a child of God because that's where true riches are found.

That is where you are truly rich. But be as you are. We need to listen to this psalm.

We can't ignore it. We can't just say, yeah that points to Christ. If we have been united to Christ, we have become a child of God, then you need to become as a child of God. We need to work hard at being God's children.

Therefore don't conform to the pattern of this world. Don't conform to the advice. Don't scoff. Don't go the way of the wicked.

But meditate on God's word. We live in a world where God's word is under attack. The postmodern world tells us that there is no one truth.

[21 : 56] That this is not the ultimate truth. But this is the word of God. We have God's final and full revelation in Christ.

Meditate on it day and night. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, if you listen to my words, you're like a man who built his house on the rock.

That when the storms and the rains came down, the house stood on firm foundation. But those that built their houses on the sand, well, they perished.

And it was a terrible thing. Strive hard to follow and listen to God. Being a righteous person, being someone who follows God, it's not just a Sunday thing.

It's a person that lives it out in all their life. But recognise that we need God's help in this. So why don't I, as I come to the end of my first sermon here, why don't I pray for myself and you, that as we continue in our lives, that we will be people that trust in Christ.

[23 : 06] That we will find true prosperity and successfulness, not in the things of this world, but in Christ. And then we sit humbly under his word.

Let's pray. Father, I pray for myself and those here, that you will help us to be people that sit under your word. Father, we thank you that you have revealed yourself in your son, that you have not left us alone, that we may learn more and more about you.

We pray that we will be people that delight in your word, that we do not follow the ways of this world, that we live lives that please you.

We pray this in your son's name. Amen.