

(8 AM) - How to Be Happy

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Preacher: Murray Campbell

[0 : 0 0] This is the 8am service at Holy Trinity on the 11th of May 2003. The preacher is Murray Campbell.

His sermon is entitled, How to be Happy, and is based on Psalm 1. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are not a God who is silent, but you have spoken to us, giving us your word.

Father, we pray that you will teach us and change us, so that we may know you and follow your Son, the Lord Jesus. And in his name we pray. Amen. There was a saying in the ancient world, all roads lead to Rome.

No matter where you were in the empire, Rome was the centre. It was the capital city. So no matter where you were living in a huge, expansive empire, whether in Gaul or in Egypt or in Spain, well, there was always a road that would take you back to Rome.

Now, there was another saying that was popular in the ancient world, and this saying is still very popular today. All roads lead to God. Or all paths lead to God.

[1 : 1 9] Now, I'm sure we've all heard this expression. You know, today it's no longer acceptable to believe that there is just one God or that there is just one way to God. No, there are many routes and there are many gods, and none is more true than the next.

I mean, this is what our government legislates. This is what our schools teach. This is what our media push for. In fact, most Aussies believe this these days. The key today is tolerance and sincerity.

Tolerate the views of other people and be sincere in what you believe. Today in Australia, the mark of genuine religion is just that.

It is tolerance and sincerity. But today, this morning, I don't want us to listen to our Australian culture, but to God. What I want us to do this morning is to turn to the Bible and to see and hear what God has to say on this matter.

In what ways are there to live? What do they look like? Where do they lead? Now, Psalm 1 is a great place to go and answer these questions. The psalm is divided into two sections, and each part presents a different way to live.

[2 : 3 0] So whilst our will may tell us, well, no, there are countless ways for us to live, but we see here in this psalm that there are just two, and we're going to look at each in turn this morning. So if you could open your Bibles again, that would be helpful.

As we go through this psalm, it's on page 424, Psalm 1. Now, I'm going to read the first three verses, and this describes what I've titled as the way of life.

Now, you'll notice the first word in the Pew Bibles is happy. Another way of saying that is blessed, and I'll probably use the word blessed throughout the talk this morning. So we read in verses 1 to 3, Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sits in the seat of mockers.

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, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers. It doesn't sound like a bad way to live, does it? To me, it sounds a lot like what people want from life.

[3 : 43] We all want to be blessed. We all want to be successful and to prosper, don't we? And these are good things, and they are on offer here in this psalm. But what exactly does it mean to be blessed and to prosper?

Who qualifies to be such a person? Well now to be happy or to be blessed, it is something quite special. It doesn't mean that you've had a string of good luck, or that fate has been kind to you.

And nor does blessed simply mean happiness, that you are happy in life. It's much more than that. It's something greater than that. The blessed man, or the blessed person, is the person who is approved of by God.

That's what it means. It means that you are esteemed, because God approves of you. And that's a pretty good position to be in, don't we think? To be blessed. It's something we all want.

But this approval by God, it's not something that everyone receives. It's something which is conditioned. Now I think that we who live in countries like Australia, we believe that it's our right to have a good life.

[4 : 52] We're good people, and God, He has to give us financial security, good health, and so on. I mean, it's His job to see that I'm rewarded well, and in this life.

And it's His job to help me when I'm in trouble, when I'm in strife. That's what happens when there's a national crisis. People begin to pray and to ask God to help them.

Perhaps you've noticed that this happens. You might act like this as well. Now, it's not a bad thing for us to pray. That's a good thing. However, I think in Australia, we so often have this mentality, it's God's job to be fixing all our problems.

But we see here in the psalm that God's blessing, it doesn't fall on everyone. Not everyone is called blessed or happy. Now in verses 1 and 2, we see that this is something which is conditioned.

And it's conditioned by three negative statements, and by two positive statements. And we're going to quickly look at them now. Now, the man who is blessed does not, one, walk in the counsel of the wicked, two, he does not stand in the way of sinners, and three, he does not sit in the seat of mockers.

[6 : 06] Now, each of these three verbs, to walk, to stand, to sit, they represent a style of living. And so we see, well, the person who's blessed, he doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked.

That is, he doesn't think like the wicked. His mind is not consumed by thoughts that displease God. And we also see, well, the person who's blessed, he doesn't stand in the way of sinners.

That is, he doesn't act like them. He doesn't behave like them. He doesn't sin. Which, of course, means, well, the man who's blessed, he doesn't grow impatient when things are not working out well.

He's not jealous of people who are financially better off, or who are married, or who have better health. He's not envious of anyone.

He's never bitter toward anyone, toward people who hurt him, or toward family who never visit. He is never deceitful. It's a high standard, isn't it?

[7 : 08] I think of when I used to play the piano. I can't remember if it was my first or second lesson at university, but my teacher told me, well, Murray, you can't really play the piano, can you?

And that was a bit of a shock to the system, I can tell you. But I understood after a while what he was saying, because he actually believed that there was no one in the world who could truly play the piano.

It was something which was an impossible task. Because to perform a piece of music perfectly, it was something which is unachievable. Now, very rarely can a pianist ever play a work without any wrong notes.

We always do it. But on an extremely rare occasion, someone may perform without any wrong notes. So say that he does. Well, what about getting the dynamics exact?

What about the pedalling that you need to use on the piano, and a thousand other elements that are required when you're playing a piece of music? Now, even if someone could play a work perfectly, it would only happen once.

[8 : 16] I mean, no one, I can't, no one, my teacher can't, can sit down on the piano every time and play music perfectly. It just can't happen. But what we see here is that the person who is blessed, not one foot ever falters.

He never sins through his actions, words, or thoughts. Never. And thirdly, we see that the man who is blessed, well, he doesn't sit in the seat of mockers.

Now, to sit in someone's seat is an act of identifying yourself with them. So, say, for example, I sat in a wheelchair. I would be identifying myself as someone who cannot walk or who struggles in walking.

You know, people passing by would say, oh, he can't walk. Or say, I visited Buckingham Palace one day and I see the throne room, wander inside, and just plonk myself on the throne.

People walking by will say, oh, he must be the king. Probably not. But that's what I would be doing. I'm saying, well, no, I'm like the monarch. Actually, while I'm talking about identification, in terms of false identification, since I've been here this week, many people have associated me with Moore College.

[9 : 31] That's fine. But then they think I'm from Sydney. As I explained earlier, I'm not from Sydney. I'm just a wee poor Melbourne lad who is just currently suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous Sydney.

That's all. So that's false identification. But if we're sitting in the seat of someone else, we're identifying ourselves with that person. But the person who is blessed, he doesn't do that.

He doesn't identify himself with those who are mockers, those who are wicked. But rather, his character, it couldn't be more different. We see that in verse 2.

His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night. Now, I'm not sure what you think about this.

For a fleeting moment when I was preparing for this morning, I imagined some nerd in his bedroom at 3 o'clock in the morning reading all these law books that he's got stacked up on his bed, turning each page of all these different legislations and laws and thinking to himself, wow, this is so exciting.

[10 : 37] But this is not the betrayal of some guy who gets a kick out of reading a law book, and I apologise to any lawyers who might be here. But it's not like that. But what is the law of the Lord? Well, the word for law here means instruction.

And so it's not denoting some impartial set of legal requirements. Not at all. But they are the caring instructions of a father to his son.

You see, God's law, it's not the demands of some angry and aggressive God who enjoys zapping people. But rather they are the caring, loving instructions of our Heavenly Father.

One who is showing his people who he is and how they can enjoy the good life. A life of blessing. So no wonder why this guy in the psalm delights in the law of God.

No wonder why he meditates on it day and night. Because the law, the word of God, it brings life. It is good. It reveals to us who God is and how we can enjoy knowing him.

[11 : 43] And so this man's commitment to the law, it ultimately reveals to us his commitment to God. Because his concern is God knowing him.

And of course that's why we read the Bible. That's why we meditate on it. It is so that we can know God. Now by the way, when the Bible uses the word meditate, it's not talking about sitting cross-legged and humming and emptying our minds of all thoughts.

No, it's nothing like that. Actually, biblical meditation is the opposite. It is filling our minds. It is filling our minds with the things of God. And so what we see here in this psalm, well, the person who's approved of by God, he's the one who delights in the Lord.

He is the one who trusts his word and who lives by it. You know, I think verse 3, it's a great description of the blessed person. If we have a look at that, verse 3.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. The blessed person, he's like a tree who just continues to grow.

[12 : 59] He just continues to bear fruit. It never withers. Whatever he does prospers. Notice that. It's not saying that only sometimes he prospers. No, whatever he does prospers.

This is the life of the person who is blessed. It's a wonderful life, isn't it? It's a wonderful life. But let's move on to the second way to live.

Let's read again verses 4 to 6. Not so the wicked. They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

The contrast with the first way to live, it is deliberate and very real. See, the first way, it is the way of life.

[14 : 01] But the second is the way of destruction. It is the life that leads only to death. Whereas the person who knows God, well, he is firmly rooted and he lives.

But the wicked, they have no firm and lasting foundation and when judgment comes, well, they will not stand. Now the judgment that's been spoken of here, it's the final day at the end of time when Jesus Christ will return as King and as Judge over the earth.

But for the wicked, there will be no possibility of getting off. They will perish. I guess perhaps when we think of that noun wicked, we might think of dreadful deeds such as murder and rape or evil men like terrorists.

You know, surely these are the wicked people who have been spoken of here. And they are. But not only them. Well, the wicked are defined as those who are not blessed.

The wicked are those who do not delight in God's word, those who do not know him. The wicked are those who are not concerned for those things which are important to God. The wicked are us.

[15 : 20] Or at least the wicked are those here who either were wicked or who are. If we find that insulting, please don't blame me.

That's God's view on the matter. Because you see, the problem is not simply that we are just imperfect, but that we willfully disobey God, that we rebel against him. That we don't put God first in our lives.

That we don't make sure that he is central to all that we do. But so often we just ignore him, just shoving him aside until we need something from him. That's how we treat God.

The wicked is any person who does not glorify God or his son with his whole life, but instead just lives for themselves or for anything else other than the God who made us and who rules this world.

I want us to listen to a couple of verses that are found in the letter to the Romans and it's a list. We read, they have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity.

[16 : 32] They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful. They invent ways of doing evil.

They disobey their parents. They are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them.

We all come in that summary somewhere, and this is not even a comprehensive list. People are wicked, and we deserve death, eternal separation from God.

This is what we deserve for rejecting God who made us, who sustains us, who provides the very air we breathe, and we do not thank him. this is what wicked people will get.

The way of the wicked will perish. And so here are the two ways to live. Yes, the world tells us, no, there are many different ways to live.

[17 : 45] We just need to be sincere and do good. And if we do that, well, we should be okay and get to heaven. But it's not like enjoying different styles of music and listen to whatever appeals to you.

Being a musician myself, I think probably because of uni I've become rather pompous or maybe a little pretentious sometimes. I know what I like in music. I know what I think is good music and what I think is bad music.

And I'm also, I guess sometimes I'm sincere in what my taste of music is. I love playing Mozart and Chopin and those sorts of fellows rather than contemporary music on the whole.

However, I still have to understand, as much as I may not like it all the time, but my view on music, it is no more right than anyone else's. When it comes down to it, my likes and dislikes in music, they are no more right than your likes in music, whether I like it or not.

But when it comes to life, God says that there are only two options. There is the life of the wicked which leads to the destruction, or there is the way of life.

[18 : 57] The person who is approved of by God, the one who lives according to his word. The Bible is very clear. These are the only two options.

However, I do think this poses a bit of a problem for us. Because if you're like myself, we don't want to belong with the wicked. We don't want to be described as that. However, the description of the blessed person doesn't really match us either.

Because at times we do sin. We don't prosper in everything we do. No matter how hard we may try, we will never reach God's standard of living for him. Whether we may be 27 years old or 77.

We're not good enough. But that's a real problem, isn't it? Because if I'm not that blessed person, then I'm one of the wicked. But I don't want to be associated with those who are wicked.

I don't want to be like them. What I'd like us to do for a moment is just to think, well, who does qualify for the description that is given here in this psalm?

[20 : 06] Who does qualify? Who perfectly obeyed God? Abraham? No, the Bible tells us that he didn't always trust God.

Moses? No, he disobeyed God. What about some characters from another religion? Buddha or Mohammed?

No. What about a humanitarian or someone like Gandhi? No. There is only one person who truly fits this picture.

The one who was true man. The man who never walked in the counsel of the wicked. The man who perfectly obeyed God's law. The man who died on our behalf.

Jesus, God's son. God's son. We see, Jesus is the blessed man. Whatever he does prospers because he utterly obeys the word of his father.

[21 : 16] Jesus lived a life that we cannot, but even more than that, Jesus died our death so that we may live for him. you see, even though we were counted among the wicked, we don't have to be, but we can be considered worthy to be blessed by God.

But it's not because of our own righteousness, it's not because I'm good enough, but it's because of Jesus' righteousness, because he lived a life that we cannot. And the Bible promises us that by trusting in Christ, his life of blessing can be ours.

Now, true, there is a price to be paid for sinning against God and that price is death. But the Bible teaches us that Jesus has paid that price for us, all our wrongdoing, all our wickedness.

Jesus has paid his penalty so that we can be made right with God. And God, he accepts us as though we have never sinned, as though we have perfectly kept his commands. This is an incredible thing for us to know.

I can be considered blessed by God because of Jesus. All my wrong.

[22 : 34] Jesus, he has dealt with it and all I need to do, all I can do, it is to trust him. It is to say thank you and to offer my life to him. And so no longer do we sit with those who do evil, but we belong to Christ.

And God counts us as his. So this is the blessing that God gives to everyone who trusts his son and who submit their lives to him.

And so the prosperity is not simply talking about those things that have some temporal value, but those things that are of eternal value. Forgiveness, a relationship with God, the certainty of heaven.

Do you know, we can be blessed more than we deserve. and on the day when the Lord Jesus returns, more than we could possibly ever imagine. Scripture tells us, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Today I want to ask, which path are you taking? The way of life or the way of destruction? They are the only two options.

[23 : 56] Now I don't stand up here this morning as someone who's got it all together as someone who's perfect, no, far from it. My parents could probably tell you that as well. But I stand simply as someone who trusts in the perfect Son of God, in Jesus who died for me if we belong to Christ, then we are counted as blessed by God and our future is with Him.

But if we say no to Jesus, then at the judgment we have no foot to stand on. Yes, sure, I can continue to this day to believe what the ever-changing world says.

Just be sincere. We'll get to heaven as long as we're sincere in what we believe and what we do. I can continue to believe that lie, but I will perish.

Jesus does not say that He is just one of the roads to God. He says, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

We cannot know God and escape His judgment if we don't submit to Jesus Christ. As the psalm says, you'll be like chaff that the wind blows away.

[25 : 19] But in Jesus, we are like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

today I urge you to accept the way of life. This morning, if you know that God is convicting you and that you know you've got to get things right with Him, then in a moment's time I'm going to pray a prayer and it's one that you can say silently to God.

And after that, Paul will come up and give us some more details as to what we can do next. Now, before I pray, I'm just going to go through the prayer with you so you know what you're going to be praying, and then we'll pray it together.

Almighty God, I confess that I have sinned against you. I am sorry for all my sin. Thank you that Jesus died for me. Today I turn to live for you, trusting Jesus for salvation.

Amen. Okay, so I'll pray it now, and I'll pray it slowly so that you can say the words after me. Let's pray. Almighty God, I confess that I have sinned against you.

[26 : 46] I am sorry for all my sin. Thank you that Jesus died for me. today. Today I turn to live for you, trusting Jesus for salvation.

Amen. Well, if you have prayed that prayer today, especially for the first time, well, then God has heard you. Scripture says, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Thanks be to God. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.