

The Two Routes - Travelling in Opposite Directions

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[0 : 00] Let's turn our minds for a short time this morning to the book of Psalms. And the first Psalm, Psalm number 1, which we read a few moments ago.

And we're going to consider the whole Psalm, which begins, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.

It isn't that Psalm 1 itself is the entrance to the book of Psalms, but the word blessed with which it begins is really, if you like, the entrance arch into the book of Psalms.

And even more so, we can say that that word blessed, as it's then explained in the Psalm, is the entrance arch into the whole Bible. Because that's really what the Bible is about, isn't it?

It's about blessedness. It's about telling us what a blessed person is, how a person comes to be called blessed or blessed, and how that is something which is explained in different ways in terms of God's salvation.

[1 : 13] Blessed is a word that can be translated happy. And as we read in Matthew chapter 5, the Beatitudes, which begin with the same word blessed, happy is certainly part of what blessed actually means.

So that blessedness, or being blessed, or being a blessed person, you can't describe that or think of that in cold terms, blessedness, just like you would some sort of mathematical formula, something that's just there as a static thing.

Blessedness very much includes happiness. It very much includes our emotional side. And to be blessed is to have that sense of true happiness as something which belongs to you, something which has been given to you, and as your property.

But being blessed is more than just emotional. It's more than just what you would call happiness. One way of giving out the meaning of the word blessed is, as somebody put it, it is to know the privilege of being under the favor of God.

The privilege of being under the favor of God. And that really captures the essence of being blessed. Because happiness, it's not something that's detached from the favor of God, or being under the favor of God.

[2 : 42] You cannot know true happiness, and have that enjoyment, that true happiness, and joy, and rejoicing that true happiness contains, without it being related intimately to the favor of God, to being under the favor of God.

So to be blessed by God is to have his favor. To be happy is to truly come under the favor of God. And really you can import that meaning into the word blessed in Matthew as well, blessed in these beatitudes as they're usually called.

So that really, just in a very brief way, is something of what's contained in the word blessed. But Psalm 1 itself opens out this in a way that gives us a definition, and then an illustration, and then reaches a conclusion.

And it divides up very conveniently into these three parts. Verses 1 and 2 give us a definition of blessedness. Firstly, in a negative way, describing what it's not.

Blessed is the one who does not walk. Walk in the counsel of the wicked. Who does not stand in the way of sinners. Who does not sit in the seat of scoffers. It takes the negative.

[4 : 01] First it says, to be blessed is to not be in these categories. But then it tells us what it is. Positively, but instead of that, his delight is in the law of the Lord.

And on his law he meditates day and night. That's the definition of blessedness. Negatively and positively, the blessed person is the one who delights in the law of the Lord.

We'll have a look at that more in a minute. And secondly, in verses 3 and 4, you have an illustration just to help us understand more of what it is to be blessed, to know the blessing of the Lord.

He tells us it's like, someone who's blessed, it's like a tree planted by the streams of water, yielding its fruit in its season. And then the contrast with us who are not blessed, which are called here the wicked or the ungodly.

They are not so, but they're like the chaff which the wind drives away. You could hardly think of a greater contrast in natural terms than a fruit-laden tree and chaff.

[5 : 04] But that's what it describes it as in the illustration given us. Thirdly, he arrives at a conclusion, having gone through the definition and the illustration, therefore, comes to this conclusion, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Definition, illustration, conclusion. Let's look at what they say in more detail.

Well, what it is not. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

Now, you notice there are different ways in which you could take, there are a whole variety of ways in which you could take these three strands of this verse. But you notice these words, counsel, way, way, and seat.

It has to do with each of them has something important. The counsel of the wicked really takes you to the thinking process behind your actions. And then you have the way of sinners, which talks about the conduct that flows from that attitude or that thinking process.

[6 : 19] And then finally, you've got the seat of scoffers, which really has the idea of belonging to a certain group of people.

So there's a progression in that. There's a development in that, not just throwing words at us to describe something in different terms. It's actually talking, in a sense, about three stages of walking away from God.

It begins with the thought processes. It ends up then in being part of this lobby that really wants to do away with God, sits in the seat of scoffers. You begin with walking in the counsel of the wicked. You give place to that sort of thinking. And then you take up the ways of sinners. And then you come to end in sitting in the seat of scoffers.

That's how it is. That's the reality of it. That's how the world is. That's the kind of thing that you see challenging the gospel today.

[7 : 19] That's the kind of thing that's, in a sense, natural to each one of us. But when you let it develop itself without the gospel coming to control it or to shape it, that's what you end up as.

That's the kind of challenge that you face today as people who value the gospel, who want to maintain the gospel and its values and its teaching and its precepts and the lifestyle that goes along with it, that values the church and what the church seeks to do and the teaching that we've given through the gospel and being part of the church, what you face in opposition to that is a very different mindset, a very different way of thinking.

It's the thinking that's given place to there being no God, there being no final arbitration that will have to be met with at the end of the course of this life, that there's no such thing as eternity, that this life is all there is to it.

The thinking process that does away with God and everything relevant and related to God and then moves from there to walk, stand in the way of sinners, to not only accept that counsel but to take up the ways of the world and then you end up, if you let that go, as you can see around you in the seat of scoffers, of those who ridicule the idea of miraculous events, of God actually being real, of there being such a thing as resurrection and eternity and judgment.

So blessed is the man, the woman, who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, who does not allow their mind to be taken up with that ungodly attitude, who does not stand in the way of sinners, who does not take up the ways of those who oppose God, and who does not sit in the seat of scoffers or scorners.

[9 : 28] But it is, his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. So the definition is, first of all, negative.

This is the blessed person, not the one who is described in verse 1, but on the contrary, is the person whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Now he talks here about the law of the Lord, and just as you find in the first case in verse 1, the definition is really by way of a relation to sinners, to the wicked, to the scoffers.

So the positive description of the blessed person is described in relation to the law of God. God. And the law of God is something that you must think of as much wider than the commandments of God.

The law of God certainly takes in and includes the commandments of God. But the law of the Lord is actually much wider than that. And in fact, when you look at throughout the Bible how this is described, the law of the Lord, and what God said, especially in the Old Testament, to the likes of kings and those who were rulers and given authority in regard to the law of God, what was meant was the whole revelation that God had given of himself.

[10:52] Everything that God had actually revealed of himself through the prophets, through the likes of Moses, and then passed on to the people, that is really the law of God.

The revelation of God. The whole revealed will of God as you now find it in Scripture. And in fact, when you come to include the New Testament, you can say quite rightly that that is actually the law of the Lord.

It is the counsel of the Lord. It is where God gives us what is really to be applied to our mindset and to our way of walking, and in other words, to our conduct and our being blessed.

And that's really the only answer. The only adequate answer to what you find in verse 1 is to take delight in the law of the Lord and to meditate in that day and night.

What shapes the mind shapes behavior. It shapes conduct. It's true on both sides. What shapes the way of the ungodly is, first of all, the counsel of the wicked and then standing in the way of sinners and then taking up your seat in the way, in the seat of scoffers.

[12:04] But on the other hand, the blessed person has the mindset that meditates on the law of the Lord and takes delight in the law of the Lord and the whole counsel and revealed will of God.

That's why it's important to come to church, to read the Bible, to ask God to bless it to you. That's where His will is revealed.

That's the law of the Lord. It's more than just commandment. It's more than just saying, here is what I command you not to do or here is what I command you to do. That's part of it.

It's there in the structure of the Bible. But then think of everything else the Bible gives you by way of counsel. Look at all the wonderful promises the Bible contains. Look at the way it teaches us about Jesus and what Jesus has done and why He's come into the world and the wonder of why He took our nature and died the death of the cross.

Think of what it says about His resurrection. Think of all these great factually accurate events, real events, things that happened, not what the people of verse 1 will actually tell you, but what is reality, what God is saying.

[13:16] This is true. This is what I want you to fill your mind with. It's the only and adequate answer to the movement, the mindset, the behavior of verse 1.

What does it say? Well, it says, His delight is in the law of the Lord. Does the Bible, the law of the Lord today, gladden your heart?

Do you come aside to it and say, I'm so thankful that this book is so unlike every other book, however good any other book may be. Here is a book that gives my heart delight.

Here's one that moves my emotions as no other can. Here's one that really touches the inner part of my soul as no other work can do. Here's one that I will find benefit in meditating in, not just for the span of my life in this world, but for the eternity that awaits me.

And as I believe in the eternity that awaits me, because this word tells me, so my delight in it today is part of my preparation. My meditation in it is part of my preparation, not only to live as a Christian here and be what I should be here for the Lord, but to prepare to meet with Him and to meet His judgment as we'll see in the last two verses.

[14:43] His delight is in the law of the Lord. And on His law He meditates day and night. What's the Lord's day to us?

Do we long to be on the golf course? Would we rather be watching football match? Would we rather be doing something like that, which in themselves you can say are perfectly legitimate ways of recreation?

Is that what really the day of the Lord is for? Or is it not for delighting in the law of the Lord and the counsel of the Lord? Is it not for meditating on the law of the Lord more than we can on other days? Because we don't have the same opportunities on other days. That's why it's really so, so good to see so many people in a place of worship like this today. And as I was looking up at the gallery

before the children went out, and to see the gallery and all of these seats pretty much filled, well it gladdens my heart, and it gladdens your heart too, I'm sure, because here is where we delight in the law of the Lord.

Here is where we meditate on the law of the Lord. Here is where we give our mind to the truth of God, so that we can spend the Lord's day, at least in part, as we come to church, and hopefully at home as well, in meditating on the law of the Lord.

[16:07] And you see, that's not just a casual acquaintance with the Bible, because the word delight and the word meditate, they really take you into a kind of very deep activity in your soul and in your mind.

It means an application of your thoughts and of your capacity to understand. It means the application of your mind to those things that God has revealed in his word.

That's the blessed man. That's the way to blessedness and further blessedness, to delight in the law of the Lord, to meditate on his law day and night.

And actually, it's very interesting, this, the word meditate is used in the next psalm, and it's interesting, these psalms are placed side by side, and if you take them together and study them for yourself afterwards, meditate, if you like, on the way that they're placed here, the beginning of the Psalter.

Well, here's one of the reasons for it. If you go to Psalm 2, you'll see there at the beginning, why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain?

[17:16] These are the people who are fighting against the Lord. The word plot there is exactly the same word in Hebrew as this word meditate in the first Psalm in verse 2.

And that's interesting because the meditating you find in verse 2 of Psalm 1 is meditating upon the law of the Lord.

And the meditating and the plotting you find in Psalm 2 is not a meditating in order to seek the favor of the Lord and to promote the Lord and the name of the Lord.

It's in the opposite direction, isn't it? It's not that those people of the world don't think, although you can say their thinking is clouded because they don't know the truth or don't want to know the truth or have a closed mind against the truth, all of which is true.

But it's a meditation against the Lord and not for Him. It's a meditation in trying to throw off the restrictions in verse 3 of Psalm 2.

[18:21] Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us. Listen to the challenges to the gospel. What are they really about? It's about the casting off the restraint that we know the gospel itself brings to humans and life in a meaningful, positive way.

It's people who don't want to live subject to the law of the Lord, to the counsel of the Lord, to the revelation of the Lord. It's really them saying, let's burst their bonds apart.

Let's cast away these cords from us. That's their plotting. That's their meditation. But the blessed person is the person who meditates on the law of the Lord, the person who takes delight in the revealed will of God.

And that's one of the ways that you show yourself in contrast to that world that seeks to destroy the gospel or really doesn't want to know the church or what a church is seeking to do.

Simply, they don't want to know the Lord and the imposition of His counsel on their lives. Here's one way you can contrast and show your contrast and show how you're different.

[19:35] That you delight in the law of the Lord. That you meditate on His law day and night. Why would people go in the middle of a week to a Bible study or to a prayer meeting or at any other time apart from the Lord's day?

Why would you do that? What is it that makes people do that? Is it just a ticking of the box that says, well, that's it. I've done my bit in the middle of the week. I know that that's what the church expects of me and in a sense that's my duty.

So I've done that. So that's it. No, it's not that. I hope it's not that. I know it's not that for yourselves. It's because people delight in the law of the Lord. It's because they want to meditate on His law at every opportunity and they don't want to let that pass whenever the opportunity arises because they're among the blessed people and the blessed people are the people who don't see themselves as better than others, who don't look down on other people.

It's not that they see themselves as superior in any way except as they are favored by God and by Him are privileged to know of His favor.

Blessed is the man on the negative side and then on the positive side. But let's look at the illustration in verses 3 and 4. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither.

[21 : 03] In all that he does he prospers. The wicked are not so but are like the chaff that the wind drives away. Now again, it's set out, as we said, by way of a contrast between the tree that's laden with fruit and the chaff that the wind blows away.

Jeremiah has a more extended chapter, a more extended passage in chapter 17 on this illustration of the fruit tree. You can read that through again for yourselves.

It's in chapter 17 and verses 7 to 8. It's a great chapter in itself but it says here that this, notice what he says in verse 7.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes for its leaves remain green and is not anxious in the year of drought for it does not cease to bear fruit.

Now that's a covenant setting where Jeremiah is dealing with the departure of the people of Judah from the law of the Lord, from the counsel of the Lord where they've gone after idols that surrounded them and the pagan nations around them in Canaanite religion especially.

[22 : 22] And here he's saying this is the blessed man. This is the one who trusts in the Lord. What is he like? He's like this tree. The same as you find here in Psalm 1. Like a tree planted by streams of water.

You see what he's saying is that because he delights in the law of God and meditates on his law day and night. The roots of his life are actually drawing the nourishment he needs and she needs from that law, from that counsel of the Lord, from that revealed will of God, from the Bible, let's put it simply.

The person who is blessed is really like the tree planted by the streams of water. That tree is not going to lack moisture. even in times of drought, it's still going to have access to moisture and it draws it because it's beside the stream.

And when the ground gets dry, the stream keeps flowing and it keeps drawing its moisture and its water from the stream. Well, that's how it is, friends, with the gospel.

The gospel, the law of the Lord, the revealed will of God, the counsel of the Lord, call it what you will, the gospel as you find it described and set forth in the Bible and the preaching of the Word of God.

[23 : 42] That's the stream of life for us. That's where God is, where God has set himself, where salvation is brought to us in this channel of the gospel.

And as we come and plant our lives beside that, as Jeremiah put it, it's the one who trusts in the Lord, who has planted his life beside the stream, who's going to draw water from the stream. Because without this, human life shrivels up. Take the tree away from access to water, what happens? Its leaf withers, it dies.

It's not going to be a fruit anymore. It's the same for human life. The devil knows very well that any society, any group of people that detach themselves from the gospel for any length of time, they're going to shrivel up pretty soon.

You know, just as your body, it can do without food much longer than it can do without water or liquid. You can survive much longer by not having food, as long as you've got water, as long as you've got a way to hydrate your body.

[24 : 55] But you cut off the water supply, you don't get the liquids in, you dehydrate, you die very soon. That's how it is spiritually as well. Cut yourself off from the gospel.

That's what the attempt out there is to actually undermine the gospel and ridicule the gospel and get people's minds away from gospel thinking and from the teaching of the word of God because the devil, because the dark power that's against the gospel that moves people, that's blinded the mind, as Paul says, of those who believe not.

He knows very well as long as people have access to the gospel, the stream is there. They can draw their spiritual water from it. And that's the blessed man who has, is like a tree planted by the streams of water and yields its fruit in its season.

In other words, it's fruit proper to its kind, isn't it? It yields its fruit in its season. Every plant has its season.

Every fruit-bearing tree has its season. And it varies somewhat from one to the other. But what it's saying to us is that the blessed person bears fruit in its season. In other words, it brings out fruit appropriate to itself.

[26 : 12] The Christian life. The life of the blessed person. It's fruit which glorifies God. It's fruit which testifies to God.

It's a lifestyle which shows that God's favor is in place in that person's life. That God is real. That the things we live for are actually real. It brings forth fruit in its season.

And its leaf does not wither. It's really just saying that it's not going to suffer from drought damage when other trees planted further away from the stream might suffer drought damage and even come to shrivel and die because this one's beside the stream.

Its leaf does not wither. It doesn't suffer from drought when drought comes. Same as Jeremiah saying in his chapter. In other words, as long as we live rooted in the word of God rooted and the roots of our life drawing our life and our sustenance the moisture for life if you like of God's truth then we're not going to be subject to drought.

Others around might shrivel up because they don't want the word of God anymore. It's not going to be like that surely for you or for me.

[27 : 39] We want to be amongst the blessed people the people that God's favor has made blessed. There's the definition there's the illustration like a tree but notice what it says the wicked are not so but like the chaff that the wind drives away.

Well what a telling contrast that is. There's a picture in your mind in verse 3 there of the tree beside the river drawing its nourishment from there the water that it draws up through the roots and nourishes the whole tree and it brings forth fruit in its season and you've got that picture of a tree laden with fruit because it's got access to all of this water and the contrast with that is the chaff.

What's the chaff? It's the kind of thing that in the old days at least used to be very obvious when a person was winnowing grain. What they did was just throw it up in the air with a kind of special wooden spade-like instrument or a fork and just throw up the grain into the air and the grain itself falls back to the ground but the chaff the husk that covers the grain blows away in the wind.

That's the intention of winnowing so that the seed comes back to the ground and you can gather the seed and the chaff is blown away with the wind. What a contrast to the fruit laden tree.

What does it say of the wicked? The people who are not concerned to live for God. Remember the wicked are not just people who have committed some terrible crime and you can say well they've murdered somebody or they've done something very obviously evil therefore they're wicked people.

[29 : 22] The Bible describes wickedness in different degrees of it but a wicked person in Psalm 1 is simply the person that's described in verse 1.

The person who lives without God who doesn't want to live for God or by God. They're like the chaff that the wind drives away and isn't it interesting and it even reinforces the contrast and adds impact to the contrast between verse 3 and 4 because verse 3 has a lot of things in its description.

It's planted by the streams of water it yields its fruit in the season its leaf does not wither and in all that he does he prospers and then you've got a verse very briefly that's just almost a throwaway verse because that's what it's about the wicked are not so they're like the chaff that the wind drives away full stop that's it the contrast is telling and that should have an impact on our souls today.

The illustration brings it out so graphically so fully so dynamically between the people who are blessed and people who don't want to be blessed and live without God in their lives therefore here's the conclusion therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous for the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish well there's firstly exclusion and you see that word therefore very important maybe you glance over it quickly as if it really didn't matter therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment in other words the judgment which it's talking about here the judgment of God the final judgment the judgment that you and I all of us are going to be subject to at the end of the world the judgment of Jesus the judge and king therefore it's not a chance outcome it's not something unrelated to the life they lived it's not something that's detached from how they dismissed

God in this world and lived for the ways of sin therefore on account of that in relation to that the wicked will not stand in the judgment and the word stand there in Hebrew means to stand erect or to keep erect and when you give it its spiritual meaning which obviously it has in the psalm you go in your mind to psalm 130 Lord who could stand if you Lord were to mark iniquity if you were to deal with us apart from mercy apart from steadfast love if you were to deal with us as we deserve to be

dealt with Lord who could stand who could stand erect and upright in righteousness in your judgment no one but with you there is forgiveness there is love there is steadfast love so that you may be feared so that we may come to know the privilege of being blessed therefore the wicked will not stand nor sinners in the congregation in the assembly of the righteous for the

[33 : 04] Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish and isn't that interesting too for the Lord knows the way of the righteous it's a follow on from verse five let's read it again so we'll get the way it runs into verse six therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous for the Lord knows the way of the righteous now the Lord knows the way of the wicked as well in the sense of which he knows all about him but there's more to this knowing in verse six than knowing all about a person or knowing all about a certain way of life it's saying there if that's all it is then it's applicable to the wicked as well as to the righteous why is he saying here for the Lord knows the way of the righteous why is that therefore making them a contrast to the wicked who will not stand in the judgment why is this the reason why the righteous will stand in the judgment well because the word know includes the word love and the word care in its meaning when you know somebody intimately when you know somebody not just in friendship but in a deep love that's really knowing someone and it brings in the whole concept of caring for them being concerned for them looking after them and so it is when it's applied to the way the

Lord knows his people the Lord knows those who are his and that knowing is a way of caring for them but the way of the wicked will perish they don't have the benefit of the care of God they've thrown that off they've refused that they think there's something better that way of the wicked will perish you know sometimes in this life you find these two ways that's the title of our study this morning the two roots are the two ways you take one or other but not both you can't take both you can't be in both but sometimes they come close to each other in this life sometimes the way of those who live without God and the way of those people they will come quite close in this life in the way that they rub up against one another in the ways of life and the ways and events of our life and our providence but in the judgment they diverge and they diverge eternally they never come near each other again the

Lord knows the way of the righteous it goes in that direction but the way of the wicked will perish it is in the opposite direction and you know some people will say to you well you free church people you just preach constantly on these sort of issues and you go to the Old Testament and you leave out the teachings of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount yes you have all of that emphasis in the Psalms why don't you go to the New Testament to the teaching of Jesus instead of preaching on all this judgment stuff which of course is not true we don't do that all the time anyway well what did Jesus say go to the teaching of Jesus go to Matthew 25 go to the teaching there that he sets out when the king returns when he comes back to set up his throne of judgment what's he going to do he going to take the sheep and put them on one side he is going to put the goats on the other side the saved and the lost the blessed and the cursed and then he will say to the wicked depart from me into the fire prepared for the devil and for his angels that's a reality we can't escape that can't leave that out of our preaching of our consideration but then he will say to those on the other side come you blessed of my father come you blessed inherit the kingdom laid up for you that's the great issue for me today and for you am

I amongst the blessed am I on the way towards eternal blessedness am I on the route that will bring me at last to everlasting life in its fullness love if I have Jesus I am if I don't then I'm not and the gospel is telling us it's as simple as that let's pray Lord our gracious God we give thanks today for the way in which you bring to our notice these two ways that we are to avoid the one and cling to the other we thank you today for the blessedness that you bring about through Jesus Christ and through your blessing of us in him we pray today that our lives may be fruitful and that in being fruitful for your glory we may seek to bring benefit to others too bless us in the world in which we are set we pray grant that others who see us may know that we are a people who not only attend to religious duties but make it our delight to be your people to meditate on your counsel on your revealed will and to find our delight therein receive us and bless us now throughout the day for Jesus sake amen well let's conclude our service this morning singing in psalm 119 again and at verse 33 that's on page 159 and we'll sing to the tune Marel psalm 119 verse 33 teach me to follow your decrees then I will keep them to the end give insight and I'll keep your law with all my heart to it attend singing to tune Marel these verses to God's praise take me to follow your decrees and I will

keep them to the end give inside and I'll keep you love with love with all my heart to it attend lead me in your environment's path for there

[40 : 29] O Lord delight I find my God in my heart towards your loss from selfish pain reserve my mind O turn my eyes from worthless things give life according to your word to me your servant keep your pledge so that you may be feared O Lord remove from me the shame I dread your love excel in righteousness

O how I long for your decree reset me in your righteousness I'll go to the main door this morning after the benediction now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always amen