

Psalm 1

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[0 : 0 0] Again to the book of Psalms, and we're going to look tonight at the first Psalm, Psalm 1. 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, 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 that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does he prospers.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. 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. Now in a sense, the first two Psalms kind of give us an introduction, as it were, to the Psalter.

The first Psalm looks at the law, and the second Psalm in many ways looks at prophecy. And in many ways, it's around these two concepts that the Old Testament moves, the law and the prophets.

Now, many people think that the same hand wrote both Psalms. Very often it gives us an introduction at the beginning to tell us, for instance, in the next few Psalms, like for instance in Psalm 3, Psalm 4, we have it given to us as a Psalm of David.

[1 : 4 0] But we don't have the author here. But people believe that the same hand wrote both Psalms, Psalm 1 and Psalm 2. And if that is the case, then David is the author.

Because we read in Acts how it tells us that David, it's quoting from Psalm 2, and it tells us that David said, and David wrote.

So if David, and we know that David wrote Psalm 2, and if it's the same hand that wrote, then David would be the author of Psalm 1. Now, one of the problems that often faces people in every generation is the idea of the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the saint.

And that causes a lot of confusion, a lot of perplexity. Why is it that sometimes the wicked really seem to prosper, and why is it that often the righteous seem to have a difficult time?

Now, that concept and that thought and these thoughts are often dealt with in Scripture and often in the Psalms. But this Psalm doesn't deal so much in these terms, but more the blessing that is attached to those who are righteous and the incredible danger that those who are without the Lord are actually in.

[3 : 0 4] That it's an awfully dangerous thing to find ourselves outside the Lord. So we find here that this Psalm is really, it's a Psalm that could be talked about as saints and sinners, because mind you, every saint is a saved sinner.

It's a Psalm about the tree and the chaff. It's a Psalm about two different ways and two different ends. It's a Psalm really of great contrasts.

Solemnly we find in this Psalm that those who stand in the way of sinners will not be able to stand in the judgment.

That's an incredible thought. Those who stand in the way of sinners, that's really what this Psalm is saying. Those who stand in the way of sinners will not be able to stand in the judgment.

And we find here that there's this great contrast between a tree that is strong and between the chaff which is blown away off the wheat.

[4 : 16] That which is, it's got no substance or anything, it's just stuff that's blown away. And there's this great contrast in this Psalm. And we've got to ask ourselves right at the very beginning as to where we are.

Where are you tonight? Very important question. Because God always wants us to face up to where we are in relation to the truth. Because we don't just come to the truth as an academic study.

God wants us to face up to the truth, to examine ourselves, to see where are we? Where do I stand in relation to what is being said?

You have to ask yourself, as I have to ask myself, do I fall into the category of the tree that has roots and is strong and is able to stand?

Or am I like the chaff which is liable to be blown away? Because these are very, very solemn, challenging thoughts. Well, we find here that it tells us that the way of the ungodly or the way of the wicked shall perish.

[5 : 24] So that it's really saying to us that irrespective of what a person may be achieving in life or doing in life, if that person's direction in life is not to the Lord and with the Lord and for the Lord, but is, in fact, going in a direction away from the Lord, and even although they may be getting on very well in life, it tells us that at the end it's a way that will perish.

You know, it tells us in the book of Proverbs that there is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

That's an incredibly solemn thought. There is a way that seems right to a person, but the end of that way is death. And that's something that we've always got to say to ourselves, what way am I on?

Am I on the right way? Because if not, it's a way of death. Now, this psalm tells us something of what it is to be blessed of the Lord.

And verse 1 has a threefold activity. We find walking, standing, and sitting. And obviously, sitting here is an activity. And in a sense, there is a kind of a development in them.

[6 : 43] Somebody who is walking, there's still a degree of flexibility about them. So that although they're walking, they can still, as it were, they're going one way, but it's still possible to turn into another direction.

Standing has the idea of becoming more fixed in the way that you're going, whereas sitting seems to speak of having arrived, that this is where you are. You're in this particular place.

This is somewhere you are satisfied in, somewhere where you have set yourself, and so on. So we're told here, and the first we see with regard to that blessing comes by way of negatives.

It's blessed not to walk in the counsel of the wicked. In other words, the believer is somebody who doesn't take his advice for life from those who would say, do not follow the Lord.

Those who don't have a place, who don't give the Lord honor in their life, the believer isn't going to take, when I say not going to take advice, that doesn't mean that in all our day-to-day activities and the way that we relate to people at work and in our communities and our neighbors and friends and all these, that we don't involve people who maybe aren't Christians and that we don't ask them this and that, because sometimes people who aren't Christians can give very good advice, and that's not what's being talked about here.

[8 : 20] The thrust here is that you're taking your direction for life, that you're looking to particular people, that your life has an involvement with these people, and here are people who have no time, no place for God.

These are people who are turned wicked. These are people who, that's God's name for them. We might not term them particularly wicked with regard to what we would look at their life, but God terms them wicked because they have refused in any way to have any dealing with them.

They have pushed them out of the equation, and their life is a life that is lived without God at all. And so the Lord is saying, we are not to live dependent upon these people.

We are not to take the direction of our life from them because they're going in the wrong direction. Their ways are wrong. So that's the first thing.

Nor are we to stand in the way of sinners. Now, as I said, we often find ourselves involved, and we can't. That's the way life is. We are involved with people of every kind of persuasion in life, and we mingle, and we work and interact, and all these kind of things.

[9 : 49] But what it's saying here, we don't stand in the way of sinners. In other words, our lifestyle, this is talking, I think, more about one's lifestyle, that your lifestyle isn't wrapped up with sinners.

That you and the sinner, the one who is living, opposed to God, that you aren't traveling down the same path, involved in the same things, doing the same things all the time.

That there has to be a separation, that you're going in a different direction. Nor sit in the seat of the scoffer. Now, this is the most serious of all.

There seems to be almost a downward spiral here. First of all, there's the wicked, the sinner, and the scoffer. In other translations, the first one, the wicked is termed the ungodly.

And the ungodly are really those who are without God. As I said, we wouldn't necessarily term them particularly wicked. Our assessment of them.

[10 : 54] We're looking here, of course, at God's assessment. But this final category, the scoffer, is the most serious of all. Here is somebody. And they have gone.

They may be one day, they took their counsel from the wicked. They may be walked with the sinner. But they're now in the place where they are scoffing.

They are mocking. They're poking fun at the Christian. They're poking fun at Christ. They are laughing. They are cynical. There is this, it's not just a hatred of the Christian faith, it's just, it's sheer mockery and derision.

And my friends, that is the worst category of all. Only great grace will take the scoffer from his seat. Only great grace will take the scoffer from his seat.

There have been many people who are careless. The church is full of people who were careless, who were apathetic, who were indifferent, who often forgot about God, who went down the wrong road.

[12 : 08] Our churches are full of people who were, had problems with drink, who were immoral, all these kind of things. But our churches are not full of people who were once scoffers.

Occasionally, somebody is brought from that seat, but not often. Because a person who is a scoffer is somebody who is laughing at God, someone who is mocking God, mocking the things of God, and has gone in a downward spiral.

The mocker, the scoffer, doesn't begin as a scoffer. They begin very often following the counsels of the wicked. And then walking in the way of the sinner.

But when they arrive in the seat of the scoffer, it's an incredibly dangerous place to be. But then, looking at the, having moved from the negatives, we now see the positive.

And we find that the man who is blessed, or the person who is blessed, tells us his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

[13 : 21] I have to ask that question of you as well. Do you delight in the law of the Lord? Is God's word precious to you? Is it something that you find that you delight in?

Is it something that you can't do without? Is God's word something that you can't do without? Or is it possible for you to go day after day after day and you never open God's word?

Is it possible that there's anybody in here and that the Lord's day, Sunday, is the only day you open God's word? That you, it's a day where you say to yourself, oh well, here's Sunday, I'm going to church and I better open my Bible.

Or is God's word precious to you? Is it your delight? Well, we find here that for the man or the person who is to be blessed, the word is a delight to them.

And you and I know that there is nothing like the Lord's word, but his delight is in the law of the Lord. You and I know that when we face troubles or problems, one of the first places we go to is the word, is it not?

[14 : 41] If we are at a point in our life where decisions have to be made, where we come to a crossroads, what do we do? Do we keep the Bible closed and we don't talk to the Lord?

Of course not. One of the first things we do is we find ourselves going to the word. What is the Lord saying? And we're looking for the guidance of God.

We're seeking to discover his word. What is the word of the Lord in this matter? And it's so important and this is a mark of those who love the Lord. And so the word of God is at the very center of our lives.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. This is an act of pondering upon the word.

It's kind of got the idea of speaking as it were half aloud to yourself. Where you're talking to yourself. Where the word is such that you're pondering over it.

[15 : 46] You're trying to digest what it's saying. And we've often mentioned this. I believe this is one of the most important ways of dealing with God's word. It's a way that it soaks, it saturates you, it gets right into you.

It's to take a small passage of God's word every day. Prayerfully think, what is this saying? So that your mind deals with the passage that is in front of you.

So that you are speaking to the Lord and you're saying, Lord, teach me today what is being said here. Help me to understand. And you read it slowly.

And you try and digest it. And you try and understand what it's saying. And you're saying, Lord, make this word become part of my life so that it'll impact you.

We don't just look at the word as something which runs in and runs out. We want it to affect our lives, to change our lives, to mold our lives. And that's what meditation does.

[16 : 53] That's why we're often told in the word of God to meditate upon the word. And that's what we mentioned at the meeting on Wednesday night. Joshua, when he was, I would have mentioned it recently, when Joshua was going into the promised land, he was told it was at the very center, as God was encouraging Joshua, as he was moving in filled with fear.

and he says, meditate upon the word, day and night. That's what he told him. And he says, if you do that, you will make your way prosperous and you will have good success.

And you'll notice in verse 3 here, it's almost the same language. The end of verse 3, in all that he does, he prospers. people today say, want to discover, what's the key to prosperity?

Well, here it is, meditation upon God's word. In all that he does, he prospers. That's what Joshua was told, that's what we find here as well. Meditating day and night.

Now, that doesn't mean that we don't do anything else in life but meditate upon the word. It means very simply that it's the habit of your life. That it is the habit of your life.

[18 : 09] This is really how your life is governed. So that the word is part of it. And the word should be moving around in your mind. You know, that's the beauty of starting the day with the Lord.

You read a wee bit of God's word in the morning. Get it into your mind. And it will stay there. It will linger. And you will often find yourself that it will affect you during the day.

God is sovereign and he will often take you that portion of his word for the day and it will affect your life at some point in the day. And you will be saying, that's amazing.

That's the very thing I was reflecting on. And here God has opened up a door for me or he's directed me or this is something that is so relevant for the situation that I am in right here and now.

It makes the word real and alive. alive. And that's what God is expecting of us to do. But you know, to enjoy the blessing that we have here, we can keep ourselves from the counsel of the wicked and the way of the sinner and the seat of the scorner, but unless our life is lived and based in the word of God, then we won't enjoy this prosperity.

[19 : 24] But then you see the result of this, that the person who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scorners and whose 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.

And here's a tree that's going to stand firm and true. It's not a tree in a desert, it's not a tree in a mountain pass, but it's beside a rich flowing stream.

And here's a tree that's tall and strong and bearing fruit. And this is a lovely description of the believer. Here's somebody who's solid and strong and fruit bearing and somebody who is flourishing.

Now, the great thing that the fact about this tree that it's beside a river means that even if there's a drought or even if there are trees elsewhere in the land that are struggling because they've got no water, here's a tree that is constantly being watered.

And you know what this really is saying to us is that the person, the believer, who can find themselves in these first two verses, will result in the verse three.

[20 : 50] And they will be Christians who will flourish and they will develop and they will grow even when others aren't. You know, there are times in God's providence and in the way that God operates that there are times when his, as it were, there's almost as if his spirit moves in communities and in the land in a greater way than at others.

Times, for instance, of revival, times of great blessing, times when there's a movement amongst his people, times where prayer is so easy, where fellowship is so sweet, where there is a power with the preaching, where there seems to be a spiritual fertility all the time.

But there are other times it's not like that. There might be what we might term leaner times. times, and God's people will find it hard to pray.

Times where they struggle, and they look back and they often say, oh, I remember other times, the good times. It's harder today. But you know, even in these times, in the lean times, here is a Christian who will still flourish, who will still grow, even when others may be struggling.

Because it seems to be that there is this, as it were, there is this watering going on. Irrespective of the spiritual climate, this person experiences development and growth and blessing.

- [22 : 34] And all he does prospers. Now, that doesn't mean that everything that he ever or she ever does, that it works out well. It doesn't mean that this idea of total prosperity in the sense that every single thing is going to work out 100%.

Because we know in God's providence that that doesn't happen. That there are times, and we know it only too well, that some of the choicest believers go through terribly painful and difficult times.

Times that they're so hurt. Times where there's tragedy. And in this very congregation, there are those who have walked so close to the Lord, and tonight their hearts are hurting.

Because God's providence has been hard. It's been sore. And sometimes we're left confused. Where choice, lovely people are taken away, and families are left with sore hearts.

And we're left with sore hearts. And sometimes there are things we don't understand. But what it does mean is this, that spiritually, everything will prosper.

- [23 : 54] And that's God's greatest aim, is for your spiritual prosperity. That you will grow and flourish, and develop, and become a choice Christian.

That you will be fruit-bearing. That's what the Lord is looking for, from your life and my life. Fruit. Jesus makes that very clear. That he comes and he examines every life.

He's looking for fruit. If there is no fruit, remember we're told, the tree will be cut down. But where there is fruit, then the tree will be pruned, so that there will be more fruit.

fruit. That's the way the Lord works. And so, the first three verses, we see there this wonderful picture of the believer.

But then, verse four, and we look at this just very briefly, there's a change. The wicked are not so. It's very stark. The wicked are not so.

- [24 : 56] All the blessings that have been talked about here. The flourishing, the developing, the prospering, the growing. Not for the wicked.

The wicked are not so. You know, they're not even, the wicked are not even described as withering trees, but as chaff. That which is blown away from the wheat.

And you know, this talks about the futility, the absolute emptiness of our life without Jesus Christ. It's like, you know, the bog cotton, that kind of white, or it's like, you know, is it the dandelion that it turns into this kind of white thing, you can later on, you blow it and away it goes.

That's what it is. It's just that the wind comes and drives it away. My friend, this is solemn. And we've got to hear this is what God is saying.

You're on the one hand, you have the tree, steadfast, rock solid, roots that are going right down. On the other hand, you've got chaff, which is just blown away. Irrespective, if you're here tonight without Jesus Christ, irrespective of how secure you feel in life, irrespective of how you feel that life is going well and you're prospering.

- [26 : 17] I want you to hear what God is saying. I want you to hear God's verdict on how things are. Ask the Lord to open your eyes and open your ears so that you may see and that you may hear and that you may understand that life without Christ is enough.

You're in a fearful predicament. You're walking, as it were, to a precipice to your doom. This is what it is saying. Because it says that therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment.

You know the expression when somebody has done something really wrong and they're found really guilty. Use the expression how they don't have a leg to stand on. You know, we use that expression.

They don't have a leg to stand on. Well, in a sense, that's exactly what we have here. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment.

They don't have a leg to stand on. It's incredibly, incredibly solemn, this. That's what it says.

[27 : 29] A fearful, a fearful verdict. And my friend, I hope that you discover before the judgment, I hope you discover before the judgment, what it is to be without Christ.

Because we see that the sinner will not enter into the congregation of the righteous. You see, there is to be separation. What these two verses are telling us, very simply, is this.

That there is judgment, there is then collapse, and finally there is expulsion. That's the way of it.

That's how it's going to be for the wicked. First there's going to be judgment, then there's going to be collapse because they can't stand, and then there's going to be expulsion because they're driven away.

It's a picture that's so far removed from the coziness and the peace of what we're able to enjoy just now. But this is God's word, this is God's verdict, this is not something that somebody is making up.

[28 : 36] The Holy Spirit has breathed this, and this is God's communication to us. But then it says, the Lord knows the way of the righteous.

Now this word, know, is more than speaking about the knowledge of something. It's got the idea of caring. It's got the idea of owning.

It's got the idea of identifying with oneself. So that's what the Lord is saying. The Lord knows the way of the righteous. That's, in other words, the Lord cares for the righteous.

The Lord owns the righteous. The Lord identifies with the righteous. My friend, if you're a believer tonight, that's what the Lord is saying of you.

He says, I care for you. I own you. I identify with you. Isn't that wonderful? Tonight you're able to say, that's how it is.

[29 : 35] The Lord knows the way of the righteous. Why? Because the righteous are on the way that he has set out for them. Remember that Jesus, we mentioned today that Jesus Christ is the way, is the door.

The door into the fold. Well, if we enter in through Jesus, remember what Jesus declared of himself, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

So if you are in Jesus, you are on the way. So the Lord knows the way of the righteous. You are on his way with him. And so he's caring for you.

He's owning you. He's identifying with you. Isn't it wonderful? But then again, finally, we see the contrast. But the way of the wicked will perish.

Isn't that awful? There's the contrast. The way of the wicked will perish. This is a way that ends up losing itself. Do you know what?

[30 : 38] There's a two-fold being lost here. The way will perish, and the person who is on that way will perish. This actual word, the word perish, has the idea of, there's various descriptions.

It's where hopes and plans are frustrated. It speaks of creatures that get lost. And it speaks of men and achievements that come to grief.

So you think of these three things. Hopes and plans that are frustrated. Creatures that get lost. men and achievements that come to grief.

So that's an awful way. It's a way of frustration, a way of getting lost, and a way that comes to grief.

That's what this word indicates. You can take these different meanings out of it. So it's an awful way to be on. So tonight, it's held out before us two ways.

[31 : 44] And in many ways, it couldn't be simpler. And you have to ask yourself this question, which way am I on? One way is a way of blessing, of spiritual prosperity, of God's ownership, of God's enriching, of God's care, of God identifying with you, where he will help you, and strengthen you, and cause you to flourish, irrespective of what's going on all around.

That's the one side. Or the other side is turning away from God, and being on a way, irrespective of how good things might be right now, a way that is going to come at the end of the day to utter frustration, grief, and lostness.

Who in their right mind would want to be on that way? That's what the Lord is saying. That's what the great challenge of the gospel is. Choose you this day whom you will serve.

Are you going to follow the Lord? Or are you going to say to the Lord, no? I don't want you. Well, it seems the most irrational thing in the world to say to the Lord, I don't want you.

Tonight, the Lord is offering himself to you. And he's saying to you, look, come on my way, where I will own you, and love you, and look after you, and care for you, and take you to be with myself.

[33 : 19] All the blessings are in him. Come, he says, to me, and have life. Let's pray. O Lord, we pray that we may hear and heed what the word says, that we do not turn away from it and despise it, but that we may accept it and believe it, and that we may live it and find blessing in that life.

Lord, watch over us, we pray, and we pray for any who may be halting between two opinions, and we pray for any who are struggling with regard to where they are.

Lord, lead them on into the security and safety that is Christ. And we pray, Lord, for those even in this moment who are being tempted by Satan not to believe, and whose own hearts are saying that this is extreme.

Lord, help us all to believe that this is God's word being spoken to us tonight. Bless us in, we pray, and take away from us our sin in Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen.