

Commitment and Blessing

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] in your Bibles, please do so to Psalm 1. Our focus this morning is going to be on the first couple of verses of Psalm 1.

Verses 1 and 2. But in order to keep it in its context, we'll read the entire six verses, which are not long. And you'll see where we'll be going over the next couple of weeks.

So now hear God's word. 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 dries away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

[1 : 27] For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Well, may God bless the reading of his word and his word to us this morning.

Well, again, if you have your Bibles with you, please turn again to Psalm 1, the first two verses in particular.

As you turn there, there is an interesting combination, which we won't be able to go into this week, between the law of God and blessedness. We'll touch on it. But also the whole idea of covetedness.

And is it possible for a Christian to be blessed in the church, and for another Christian to be able to look at that Christian, and wonder why he or she doesn't have what they have?

You know, one of the Ten Commandments is, you know, do not covet what your neighbor has. And there's a list of things included in that. A blessedness here comes out of commitment to the law of God.

[2 : 35] So, straight away, I want us to understand that as long as tomorrow comes, there is a day in order to be blessed by God in it.

Too much of today, even now, may have already passed. But you ought to spend perhaps the afternoon or the evening doing what this man does.

Nothing happens all of a sudden. And what does happen, especially when it comes to spiritual blessedness, happens in the way that fruit grows.

You know, things take times. Things have seasons. The issue of being rooted, which is spoken of here in God, produces its fruit accordingly, but it must draw it, its source of strength and power and blessedness from somewhere else.

The blessing is not the fruit on the tree, though you could consider that a blessing. Rather, the blessing is the source that produces the fruit. Now, more of this will be said as we move forward through this psalm.

[3 : 46] But for this morning, I want us to concentrate just on the first two verses. The psalmist is very clear that he wants to give us great insight into what makes a person blessed and what stops a person from being blessed.

And the issue is fairly easy to see, and it is especially seen in the life of King Solomon. If you take King Solomon as a person to examine, you'll understand quite clearly that his life was full of blessing.

I mean, abundant blessing. But his life became very joyless at the end. Now, he had all the answers. He had everything, but he didn't have joy.

And joy is the necessary ingredient to make all the other things taste good. A bit like salt on chips. Potatoes are nice, but boy, do they taste so much better when you add that salt.

In the same kind of way, joy is what gives the goodness to the good things. Without the joy, even the good things become bland.

[4 : 55] And Solomon had everything, but it was bland. Okay? There was no difference. But his life wasn't always that way. So what was the turning point?

What was the turning point between being a blessed man to being a joyless man? And the answer is very simple, and that is that he failed to commit.

Commitment is something that must grow. Solomon got it the other way around. He was committed, and then he failed to remain committed.

Commitment to God is the thing that produces everything else here. God is the giver, but being committed to God in the first place is your responsibility.

So Solomon had all the learning that he could have ever wanted, all the wisdom that he could have ever needed, all the understanding, and he had more answers than everybody else. But what he didn't have was commitment.

[5 : 56] And because of his failure to commit, everything else just seemed to be bland. This is why if you read the book of Ecclesiastes, he's a very sad man.

He's a man that has everything. Great learning, great understanding, great answers, but there's no joy. He lives quite a pointless life, to put it in his own words.

Vanity of vanities. Well, how do you get to be in that type of position? Even if you take Madonna, you know, there's not much that Madonna hasn't done.

And there's not much that Madonna doesn't actually have. But she described her life as going into the kitchen, opening the cupboards, and they were bare. But how does a person who has everything get to that point, where they recognize that what they have is nothing?

And the thing is, is they're unable to know what it is that's missing that gives them the blessedness. And the blessedness here is caused by committing.

[7 : 01] Psalm 1 is about a man who worships God and knows that if he is to worship God, he is to worship God according to his law. In fact, the law says that not only must you not worship any other god, idols of your own making, but you must also worship God in the way God commanded.

I think this is why much worship fails miserably. Much personal worship fails. And dare I say that even in churches throughout the world, no true worship is going on because there's a failure of people to worship God as God commanded.

Sure, you can do things in your own way, and that's the trouble. People are doing things in their own way. But the commandment specifically says that we're to worship God as God commanded.

Theologically, we call this term the regulative principle. And what that means is the Bible regulates what I am to think. The Bible regulates what I am to feel. The Bible regulates what I am to do.

Anything I do outside of that is disconnected from God and his word. But you'll notice that this man here delights in the law of the Lord.

[8 : 17] In other words, he is regulated by God. He is commanded, directed, guided by God. He understands that true worship that leads to true blessedness must follow God's ways.

Now, you can make up your own ways and claim that they're God's. God told me to do this. God told me to do that. I felt this in my bones. I believe this is going to happen. You can do that.

But I can guarantee to you that if it doesn't measure to God's word, it isn't going to measure to the blessedness that God's word promises. That's the issue that we have here.

So you may look at me as someone who's stuck in the mud, who doesn't want to move outside of the boundaries of God's word. But you ought to really be happy that I don't want to move outside of the boundaries of God's word.

For this one reason. That you come here this morning to hear God and not me. You come here this morning to hear God's thoughts and not my own thoughts. And so if I'm telling you something other than what the word of God says, I'm only telling you what I think.

[9 : 18] And who's interested in that? I'm not even interested in that. No. The point is, is that the point of the message has to be the point of the passage, or else there's no point in listening to it.

Clear. So you want to be blessed. I want you to be blessed. I want to be blessed. But in order for that blessed man to appear in our own life, then we must do what the blessed man does in Scripture.

And one of the things that he does is that he commits. He commits to the ways of God, to the laws of God. He also doesn't do certain things.

And you'll notice that in verse 1. He doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked. That means he doesn't listen to people who don't love God. And how easy it is to listen to people who don't love God.

Okay. They're on the TV all the time. Okay. Doesn't listen to those type of people. And nor does he stand in the way of sinners. And nor does he sit in the seat of scoffers.

[10 : 20] I want you to notice that there's a backward progression. Well, how can something be backwards at the same time by moving forwards? Well, all of a sudden this man is walking. But then he's standing.

And then he's sitting. Let me give an illustration to perhaps the younger children in the fellowship. Okay. You're walking with your mates that may not be the best mates for you. Okay.

They're not following God. They're not loving God. And yet you're walking with them. If you're not careful, it won't be too long before you're standing with them. On a street corner, under a bus shelter, wherever it may be.

And it won't be much long after that before you're sitting with them. Perhaps in their houses, up in their room. What's the problem? The problem is that people are drawn in as they progress in a backward way.

The wicked, the council of the wicked, come and do this, come and listen to me, can draw people down to the point where you're sat with them. No longer can you walk away.

[11 : 19] No longer are you just standing with them. But you're sat. You're engaged in their conversation. Well, the same is true even with adults and perhaps daytime television.

You know why they put those type of programs that they do on in the middle of the day where people turn up and listen to other people's problems? It's because you're doing exactly the same thing.

They know people like that watch people like that. Walking, standing, sitting. Okay. It's a downward spiral where your life, by comparison, may be better or it may be similar to other people.

You just don't have the 500 pound for turning up on TV saying what your problems are, whatever it may be. Proverbs teaches us, if you were to flick over into the next book, that nobody can find the right path on their own.

To lean on your own understanding is to wander off in a wrong direction. Okay. The reason we have pastors and elders is not because they know more, but it is to guide the direction of the church.

[12 : 27] Okay. And the pastor himself must lean on God and godly people who will speak words of wisdom to him so that that happens. Anybody who leans on their own understanding is going to get lost.

Anybody who leans on their own understanding is going to drift away from God and their commitment. Proverbs is quite clear on that. Don't do it. Don't lean on your own understanding, but rather acknowledge God in all your ways and he will make your paths straight.

If you want to walk on straight paths, if you want to go in the right direction and you don't want to go round in circles and you want to make progress, real progress, then don't listen to yourself.

Listen to God. Don't lean on your own understanding, but acknowledge God in all your ways. Simple. It's so simple. The issue, underlining all of this, is whether or not you will commit or whether or not you will fail to commit.

The blessed man is the man who commits to the ways of God. On his law, he meditates day and night. He is absolutely devoted to listening to God.

[13 : 37] He is absolutely devoted to filling his mind with what God thinks. He is absolutely devoted to filling his heart with what God has spoken.

Why? Because he understands that every step he takes will either be guided by himself or guided by God. A step taken as you lean on your own understanding will take you in one direction, but a step taken as you listen to God will lead you in a different direction.

Blessed is the man. Blessed is the man who walks not in those kind of ways, but who meditates on what God has said day and night.

The first commitment is a commitment to listen to God and not yourself. That's his commitment. On God's law, he meditates day and night. So what does this man know?

Well, this man knows several things. The first thing is this, that lies don't bring joy, they only bring sorrow. Now, there is a kind of lies that people do believe in order to not face the truth, and we've all done that.

[14 : 50] But the man here recognizes that no lie can ever bring true joy, but rather lies bring sorrow. They just cannot produce the type of joy or the blessedness that God wants.

And if he is to commit to what God has spoken, he must believe in his whole heart that God is the source of all truth. Now, that's really important for you this morning.

Just in case you leave here going, well, what if? What if there's something more? What if this? What if that? The moment that occurs in this blessed man, he knows not to listen to that.

He knows from his heart of hearts that the only source of truth comes from God. There is nothing being left out. God has said everything that you need to know, and he's said everything that you need to commit to.

He hasn't left anything out. So the moment you live your Christian life, and that question comes up, but what if? What if I am the next? What if I can? What if? What if?

[15 : 53] What if? What if? Well, that what if may take you down a very, very long road, promising you great riches all the way until you get to an end where there is nothing. Nothing.

The what if is not a good advice to follow, especially when it comes from your own. Only the truth will satisfy. Only the truth will satisfy.

This man commits to God's word day and night, meditates on it day and night, because he recognized that there is no joy in lies. There's only joy in God's word.

And the blessed man does this. He trusts completely in the confidence of God, and he doesn't suffer from overconfidence. Overconfidence. Overconfidence especially shows up in your life when you think you can make a better decision than God.

That's overconfidence. Let's not talk about overconfidence in doing a particular skill. Let's talk about overconfidence in the question of decision making. The moment you think, the moment you think that you can make a better decision from God, you are suffering from overconfidence.

[17 : 08] You're overconfident. Let no man think more highly of himself than he ought. Well, that's the very thing that you're doing. Overconfidence. God can make the best decisions.

God is the God who guides. And if we get on to the issue of covetousness, we can understand that more clearly. So let me just speak then to the thing that he knows, that if lies don't satisfy, then truths must.

Only the truth can satisfy. Now, children especially seem to make the same mistakes now that we used to when we were children. And here's the first one, I think.

Knowing that we should have listened earlier. I'll give you an example. Your children are outside playing. They're having a good time. And you want to take them to this wonderful place.

They've never been there. But you know it's fantastic. And you say to them, come on, let's go. You're going to have a great time. But they don't want to go because they're quite happy where they are. And they can't imagine what that place will be like.

[18 : 14] And they don't want to go. You say, no, but you don't understand. It's better than what you're doing right now. But they can't imagine that it will be better than what they're doing right now. Whether it's playing on a video game or picking grass in the garden.

Whatever it may be. They can't believe that it's going to be better than what they're currently doing. And yet you're trying to persuade them. It's really going to be much, much better. And because you're the parent, eventually they go.

Hopefully. After much struggle and pain and strife, they go. And let's just imagine that there's no arguing in the car on the journey there. You eventually get there.

And suddenly they realize for themselves how great it is. How wonderful it is. And partway through the day, the truth hits them.

And it's this. Why didn't I listen sooner? So that I could have been here sooner. And then they're angry at you for not taking them. Right?

[19 : 13] Are they not angry at you for not bringing them sooner? Because now they have to leave? Not recognizing they spent half a day not wanting to go in the first place? Because we have to enter into the truth.

To understand how blessed it is. To understand how blessed it is. Because you can't quite imagine it. And we all suffer from it. Children did exactly what we did when we were children.

You know, they can't. Here's the second thing that I think children suffer from. As adults do as well. But adults get used to it. Because we recognize more clearly that only the truth can satisfy and give great joy.

So imagine it like this. Santa Claus. I happen to know that while I have seen him in Asda. And Tesco and down at the Guile.

I happen to know that it's not the same person. I also happen to know that he doesn't bring Christmas presents. But parents do.

[20 : 23] But I want to take you back as a child. If you believe in Santa Claus. Or even if you as a child once believed in Santa Claus. And just how excited it made you feel.

You know, a couple of days before. You can't even contain yourself with excitement. How joyful you were. And the children are literally bouncing off the walls. Because time isn't moving fast enough for them.

You know. And the one day where you don't. Where, you know. All the rest of the year you want them to sleep in. Now, don't get up too early. Well, actually, the other way around, isn't it?

They are sleeping in. You want to get them to school, but they're sleeping in. And the one morning where you think, oh, can they just sleep in? They're up super early. They have a wonderful day.

The excitement is uncontrollable. But let's say several years later, the child finally realizes that Santa Claus doesn't exist. And they're really, really sad. And you already know that Santa Claus doesn't exist.

[21 : 27] And let's just say at the same point, you are really sad. I don't know what's caused the sadness. A recent divorce. Your children are not speaking to you.

Trouble at work. I don't know what's caused the upset or the pain. But you are really down. Would it do you any good if I said to you, why don't you just believe that Santa Claus exists again?

Do you remember how happy you were when you believed that Santa Claus existed? Why don't you just believe that again and allow all that joy and excitement to return to your soul? You'd realize that it wouldn't for one simple reason.

It's not true. It's not true. See, as adults, we know that only the truth can truly satisfy.

Only the truth can really give us that joy. Yeah, sure, you can believe a lie as a child. And it provides that sort of temporary satisfaction and joyfulness.

[22 : 32] But it soon disappears the moment you know the truth. People who know the truth, people who have been given the truth by Jesus Christ, I am the way, the truth, and the life, can no longer be satisfied with lies and can no longer be satisfied when they lie to themselves.

And boy, do we lie to ourselves a lot. And then we wonder why we're so dissatisfied. Lies don't satisfy.

Only the truth satisfies. Well, there's another thing to consider here. And that is why the man is blessed.

In other words, he has a believer's delight. He delights in the law of the Lord, verse 2. And on his law, he meditates day and night.

Number one, the Christian life is always going to be about committing to some things and not committing to others. But how do you choose which things to commit to and which things to avoid? Very difficult.

[23 : 35] Very, very difficult. I once heard his name, Christopher Hitchens, his name almost slipped to me, before he passed away, said this, that jealousy was the necessary spur for advancement.

In other words, what he meant by that is, is that if you see what somebody else has and you want it, that you go ahead and get it and the world advances that way. The issue is, what do we commit to and what do we avoid?

There's got to be some things that we say no to. And the psalmist understands completely that the Christian life, or the life lived before God, is not just about making decisions to do this, but it's also about making decisions not to do other things.

In other words, it's not enough to be told just what to do. We have to equally be told what not to do. And the reason for that is because it's that children's thing that grows through.

That some adults haven't quite got it. That, you know, you didn't tell me that. No, but by implication I meant that as well. In other words, we think that if certain things haven't been said, then they're automatically included rather than excluded.

[24 : 44] In other words, if the Bible doesn't say anything about gambling, then gambling's okay. Well, the Bible does say something about gambling. If the Bible doesn't say anything about drunkenness, then we're okay. But the Bible does say something about that.

And what that means is simply this, that you will live your life to the measure of your own understanding of God's Word. The reason why the man meditates on the law day and night is because he understands quite clearly that he needs authority over his inner self.

God's law has the authority over the inner man. That's the point here. God's law is what directs our thoughts, our feelings, what we do and what we don't do.

So he recognizes that he is to delight in the law. If he doesn't, then he's going to give it up. Here's why. I'll use another illustration.

A man who's married, he works all day, but he loves playing football at night. Every time he plays football, he feels amazing. Every time he plays football, or whatever he does with football, goalkeeper, manager, he just feels like a Premier League player, or Division I player, whatever it may be.

[26 : 00] But his marriage is dull. And every time he comes home, he finds the home life boring. He finds it like what he should be delighting in have become chores.

That responsibilities that should produce great excitement have just become burdens that are unbearable. Now imagine those two things. In one sphere of life, he's bored.

In the other sphere of life, he feels like a superhuman. Which do you think he's going to give up first? It's easy.

It's really easy to understand why some relationships flourish and others fail. It's not rocket science. And it's really easy to see why some believers flourish in their relationship with God and others fail miserably.

One is a delight and one is a chore. One is great and one is boring. The reason why this man must meditate on the law day and night is because he cannot allow himself for what he feels towards things that make him feel great to get in the way of the things that can actually produce real blessedness.

[27 : 29] He understands that he needs an authority over his inner life, over his thoughts, his feelings, over everything.

He's a blessed man who delights in the law of the Lord, which reinforces the blessedness, which then reinforces the delight.

Why? Because it's very, very difficult to give up the things that give us joy. He understands that by delighting in the law of the Lord, it'll produce in him blessedness, and that blessedness will reinforce the feeling of joy, reinforce the feeling of delight, which keeps the momentum going.

If he doesn't, he will lose it. And the reason why people give up things is because they don't love them anymore. It's not just because they're bad habits.

If you give up a habit because you think, well, it's bad for me, but you haven't really fallen out of love for it, you can guarantee that in a few months that habit's going to come back in, whether it be a perpetual sin, whatever it may be.

[28 : 35] The reason you do it is because you want to do it. The reason you do it is because you're committed to it. Notice carefully the structure of verses 1 and 2.

In verse 1, we're told the man is blessed, but we're not actually told why. We're told what he doesn't do, but we're not actually told why he doesn't do it. Interesting.

It's not until verse 2 do we find out why he is blessed and why he doesn't walk in the council or sit or stand with the people who don't love God. And the reason he doesn't do it is because he has this authority over his inward life.

The law of the Lord is the thing that makes him blessed, and the law of the Lord is the thing that keeps him walking in God's ways rather than the ways of others.

The law of God is the authority over your inner self, in this sense. So love the law. Don't just obey the law, love it.

[29 : 43] And what I mean by that is, is when you understand that the law is the sort of benchmark of relationship, you understand that this has got nothing to do with obedience or disobedience as such. This has got everything to do with who you love the most.

In other words, you can get divorced without breaking the law. You know, the law of the land. But you can't get divorced and stay in love.

The love's gone with it, or the love went before it. Yeah, God is, God understands everything. Of course he does. This man here does as well.

That to love God is really a commitment to God. To obey his law is really a commitment to God and your relationship. To break the law is really to break the relationship or to put the relationship under strain with God.

That's why God forgives. So don't think about this in terms of obeying the law or disobeying the law. Think about it in terms of who do you love the most. Jesus said, you know, very, very clearly that if you love me, you'll keep my commandments.

[30 : 50] Jesus understood that love was the necessary ingredients to obey. It doesn't go the other way around. Why do we give up the things that we do?

Why is the man more likely to give up his wife and children than he is the football? Why is that more likely, and why is that such a common story time and time again? And why do we see it again and again in the church, where people come to church simply to satisfy their conscience and appearance, but not actually to draw close to God?

The reason being is because they have loved or fallen in love with something else more than God. In other words, they're becoming like Solomon. They're failing to commit in their old life.

Do you know what? I used to think that the worst age for being a Christian was probably the teenage. And yet, when you read Scripture, it's completely the other way around.

The most dangerous age to be a believer is in your old age. Look at how many men and women failed in Scripture in their old age. David couldn't even keep himself warm in the end.

[32 : 13] Solomon failed post-40. Post-40. I've got to be super careful. Why? Because the temptation to fail now is greater, biblically speaking, than what it was pre-40.

That's challenging. Deeply challenging. So we worry about the youth. I worry about a church with older people in it. Because the failure rate to commit increases as you get older.

Look at Solomon. Look at David. Look at some of the others. Let's conclude this. The first conclusion would be this.

Listen to God day and night. Day and night. Meditate on his word. That is to fill your life completely with what God has spoken day and night.

Don't be content with satisfying your conscience and appearance in church. Meditate day and night. And be blessed by God.

[33 : 26] In other words, go to God to get the commitment you need to remain committed to God. We ought to recognize that there's a great deal of wisdom needed to live the believing life.

And the wisdom is go to God. Receive from his word. Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. Commitment begins with knowing God and what he has promised.

Knowing who God is. The reason why believers make commitments is because we make commitments in a world that is changing. Right?

We make commitments so that a changing world doesn't change us. Let me say that again. The reason why believers are called to make commitments is so that in a changing world we don't change.

And true commitment is only ever seen when changes occur. What will you stick with and what will you let go of? True commitment is seen in a time of change.

[34 : 34] Here's the final thought. Commitment is a sign of growth. Commitment is a sign of maturity. But being committed to the things of God is the very gateway to the blessing.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners nor sit in the seats as cofferers but his delight. The thing he loves the most.

The thing that is not just of that he values the most but is of most value is the law of the Lord. And on that law he meditates day and night.

If that's not a committed man I don't know what is. Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.