

The blessing of responsibility

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[0 : 00] Well, it may be a little bit difficult to notice a pattern only the second Sunday into the new year, but I'd like to turn your attention to Psalm 1, and as you do, remind you where we were last week. Last week, we recognized that worship is simply the way a Christian lives, that all that they do is an act of worship, and worship cannot be reduced to simply a short amount of time on a Sunday morning or a Sunday evening, but it is a way of life, a particular way of life that only Christ Jesus makes possible for us.

As we come to Psalm 1, you know, my records are pretty good. I know that as a church, it's almost been exactly three years since we looked at this psalm, but the last time we looked at it, we looked at it in three separate messages, taking the verses. I can even remember, funnily enough, who was paying attention, and therefore, I know that you'll think, oh, this is a repetition, but for everyone else, you think this is brand new, but we'll see. The reason for going through this psalm following the psalm that we looked at last week is simply to get back to some of the basics and some of the basic distinctions of what actually defines the Christian life.

As you'll notice, the intention is to move you away from simply saying that the Christian life is an act of belief. It is an act of belief, but my concern is what do you believe about what you believe, rather than just saying what you believe. And you'll begin to understand it if you understand that these messages, that are psalms and elsewhere as we move forward, add additional layers of both depth and strength to your Christian life. So now hear God's word. Psalm 1.

Psalm 1.

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. Well, may God bless his word to our hearts. The reading of his word, the hearing of his word. We'll come back to that after this next hymn.

[3 : 27] Thank you. Well, if you have someone open in front of you, it'll help, help you.

And as I said, though we looked at this psalm three years ago, I don't think it'll do us any harm to look at it again. And last time we looked at it in terms of three separate sermons. And therefore, the depth was a little different. But I'd like to be able to cover everything that Psalm 1 teaches. And I'd like to be able to do so under the heading of the blessing of responsibility. There is blessing to responsibility. And there is blessing when you take responsibility. Now, Christians know, of course, if they've been reading God's word for some time, that responsibilities are different for different Christians because, you know, some may be husbands, some may be mothers, some may be children. And of course, that shapes what responsibility we take from what we don't take, what we can do from what we can't do. There's a number of things. But Psalm 1 here, makes quite clear, the way of a Christian life, the way of a life blessed by God. And so I don't think it will do us any harm simply to go back to the basics and simply ask ourselves the question, am I fulfilling my responsibility as a Christian? Now, this isn't to say anything about the sufficiency of God's grace. It is by the sufficiency of God's grace that I am able to fulfill my responsibility.

Okay? So I'm not saying this is the Christian life is dependent on what my efforts alone. And what I'm saying is, is the Christian life is dependent on God's grace to produce those efforts that we make to live the responsible life that God has given us, to take responsibility, to make decisions, to live out those decisions. And now, I therefore want to go through the gospel in light of the, therefore I want to go through Psalm 1 in light of the gospel. And it is the gospel that clearly teaches, or at least the extension of the gospel, that God's grace is sufficient, because God's grace is always sufficient. It is sufficiently given so that we may live the life that God wants us to live. God does not hold back and then expect more. We are told not to, fathers in particular, are told not to frustrate their sons and their daughters by asking them to do things that they clearly could not do, to provoke them in that kind of way, to expect more than what they're actually capable of. And God doesn't do it with you. So what God does do is that he gives you his grace so that he can expect from you what he is asking from you. He's giving you the grace of God into your life so that when he asks from your life certain things, you are able to give them.

So we can never say, well, I'm not able. Well, we might say that, but that would be a way of not taking the responsibility that God has clearly given us the grace to take responsibility. So the divine grace that God gives us is never less than what we need to live the Christian life that God has given us to live. But the question that needs to be answered is that if I have this grace, how then do I, what do I do with it? How do I live this Christian life? And Psalm 1 brings it down to the very, very basics.

In other words, before you do anything else with your Christian life, you at least ought to be doing this. And if you're not doing this, it would be worth your time and attention to give up other things to make time to do this. If some things have to go, it shouldn't be these. If some things have to disappear in your life in order to do these, get rid of them so that you can do these.

[8 : 09] And the reason for doing them is because they are the defining marks of a blessed life, a life favoured by God and a life that actually produces spiritual fruitfulness that doesn't necessarily benefit you as much as it benefits others. And that's one of the ways that God wants us to learn together in a congregation so that we all understand that my spiritual walk with the Lord affects you. And your spiritual walk with the Lord, your daily walk affects me.

If one person is doing all the cooking and the other person is doing all the eating, you can understand how that is an unfair balance. It would be like a church where one person is benefiting from all the service and another person is doing all the service. That would be an unfair balance. Do we have that in churches? Of course we do. Why do we have it in churches? Because not everyone lives to the basics of Psalm 1. Hence why we're addressing the basics again. So here's the summary of how Psalm 1 unfolds.

You'll notice that it begins and ends with this idea of standing. Where do you stand before God?

Those who stand with the wicked, verse 1, will not be able to stand before God in the time of judgment, verse 5. Where you stand in this life will determine whether or not you're going to be able to stand when you actually come before God in the judgment. The psalm makes distinctions. It defines a particular way different than other ways. And the blessed man is defined by not doing one thing and by doing something else. He doesn't say, well I don't do that. He says, I don't do that and I do do this.

I don't hang around. I don't walk, stand or sit with the counsel of the wicked. Instead, I meditate on God's word day and night, verse 1. This is what I don't do. And when I'm not doing the things that I'm not meant to be doing, what am I doing instead? Well I'm every day and every night, I'm speaking God's word into my life. The idea of meditation here, on his law at the end of verse 2, sorry, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. The actual, if you were to take it back to Hebrew, and I don't want to get all technical, but the word meditate there really means to whisper God's word into your own life. So that as you're at home reading out loud, not only are you reading God's word, but you are hearing God's word. You're hearing it because you're speaking it out loud. You are hearing

[11:18] God's word. So the blessed man is the man who goes home and hears God's word. And he hears it by speaking it to himself out loud. He doesn't just have like this internal monologue. He has this audible sound that he listens to. And it's his own voice, but it's the word of God that he's actually listening to.

That's what he is doing. Read out loud would, might be the practical application here. When you're at home and someone's looking through the window and it looks like you're speaking to yourself, you're actually speaking God's word and hearing God's word. Or you could be speaking to yourself.

So the man doesn't mix with the counsel of the wicked. Now this is a really important distinction because the distinction here is not what we might think that it is so that we can safely say that we're on the other side of the line. So you'll notice here that the counsel of the wicked and the congregation of the righteous is the two distinct groups. And so as he devotes himself to the law of the Lord, the word of God, he's not tempted to hang around with those who don't do it. And so the line of distinction here is not between unbeliever and believer, and I'm on this side of the line because I'm a believer. Rather, the line of distinction is between those who don't devote themselves to the Lord and those who do. And therefore, those people can be within the people of God. These wicked people can be people within the congregation of God's people. So all of a sudden, we thought we were on this side of the line, safe as a believer. But with a little understanding of what the text is actually saying, we now find ourselves on the other side of the line because I'm not like the man who devotes himself to the law and to the word of God every day and every night. You see, when we draw a line of distinction where scripture doesn't draw a line of distinction, we always draw it down the middle of believers on one side and unbelievers on the other side. And therefore, we always think that we're safe and secure in the sense that I'm on this side of the line. But when you read someone, you understand that the line's not actually drawn there. The line is actually drawn between what you do from what you don't do. The line of distinction here is verse two. It's the man who stands on this side of the line, devoting his life to the word of God every day and every night, rather than on the other side of the line, who might actually be God's people, who are wicked because they don't do it. In other words, a person of God in Israel can believe that they ought to devote themselves to the law of the Lord every day and night, and then not do it. They believe that they ought to. They can believe that it's the right thing to do. They can believe all the right things. But that the distinction is not belief. The distinction is what you do.

So don't tell me what you believe. Tell me what you do about what you believe. This is why the psalm begins with we know what the man believes because of what he eventually does. And we can claim, others can claim they believe it, but it's not true. So the idea here of all of us thinking that we're on the safe side can find out quite quickly that we may not actually be on the side that we think we are because we're not actually doing what the blessed man is doing. And therefore, we immediately find we're on the other side, the side that we didn't think that we were on. Now, that doesn't mean that you can't cross over. But what it means is, is clearly identifying where we are in our walk with God. So we draw the line of distinction in the same place where God draws it, right down through the middle of the council.

We don't get our marching orders from celebrities, though celebrities often like to give marching orders and speak on certain issues. Someone wins an award for acting, and then they go on to speak about global warming. Well, it seems to me that they might have an inclination of what's going on, but they could be speaking out of their sphere of competence. Let's understand where the issues are.

[16:10] Who do we listen to? The council of those who don't know what they're talking about, or at least do, but they're not the source of knowledge, like God is, or God in the congregation of the righteous.

So the devotion to the Lord, speaking God's word into your life every day and every night, is where the line of distinction is drawn. It's drawn between two groups of people, but it's not drawn between believing and unbelieving. It's drawn between spending time with God in his word and prayer and not spending time with God in word and prayer. So the wicked are defined by the reverse of what the blessed man is defined. Their life is defined by no daily commitment to the word of God.

That's what the wicked person is here. They seek their own counsel amongst themselves, but not from God. Their life is not marred by any particular strength of devotion to God himself. In other words, they go out and live without asking God how they ought to go out and live in the first place.

And how do I know what decision to make it work? How do I know where to go or what to do? What commitments I should make? Who should I vote for? Should I even vote at all? That they make all of those kind of decisions without ever being counseled by the word of God. That they watch the news for their counsel. They watch their peer groups for their counsel. The kids on the street corner, that becomes the counsel for young children. And it ought not to be. The counsel needs to come from God. That meditation and commitment there. So there's on one side, no daily commitment and therefore seeking your own counsel, resting in the counsel of others who are your equals or perhaps don't have as much knowledge that you do. And then on the other side, the man who recognizes that God is the place that he needs to go to, to hear what he needs to hear. So a matter of focus. A matter of focus. Before we can consider how to take responsibility, we must admit that responsibility is something that I have to take.

I have to take responsibility for my own life. I have to take responsibility for what I do and what I don't do. And I must be held accountable in the congregation of righteous people for what I do and what I, of course before God, but also within my family. I can't just behave any way I want to behave.

[19:04] It's, it's, you're just not allowed to do that. I, there's an accountability with the responsibility. And I've always said, at least I've tried very hard in sort of the 19 plus years that I've been in ministry to define authority as one simple way. Authority flows to those who take responsibility.

That's it. You don't have authority because you have a title or a position in the church. Deacons, by virtue of being deacons, don't have any authority. Elders, by virtue of simply being an elder, don't have any authority. Pastors, by simply being a pastor, you don't have authority.

Authority only flows to those who take responsibility. And so if you take responsibility, you have the authority that goes with it. At least that's what I read. And so the authority of a mother is found in her mothering. The authority of a wife is found in the fact that she is being the wife that God wants her to be. The same with a husband and son. So I have the right to say certain things because I believe that I take responsibility and I, and I'm accountable for that responsibility in, as a husband, as a father, as a pastor, as an elder, as a number of different reasons. And that's the way it should be for all of us. And so there are those amongst God's people like in Israel back in David's day and all the king's day where you have a king like King David, King Solomon, King Saul, and you have the people down below, some who are trying to live the way that God wants them to live, and others just don't care. We've got the temple, we've got a king, we're in our own land, everything's good.

And now I can, but their life seems to be distinctly different than what the life that God has called them to actually live. And it really doesn't need to be. It's an area of focus, your focus and devotion to God. Is it, are you, what's getting in the way of you speaking God's word to yourself every day and every night? What is it that actually gets in the way? Is it your desire to do something else?

Is it your, your commitments to other things? What is it that's getting in the way? Spot what's getting in the way and go take a sledgehammer to it. Go, go get rid of it and, and then get back on track.

[21 : 40] This is the responsibility that you are called to take. So God is worshipped properly in this way when his word is obeyed. If we want to know whether or not we've actually come to church and worshipped God at any point, we, we have to ask another question and that is, at what point did I start obeying his word? And if we want to ask the question, um, am I serving God today? We then need to ask another question that is, at what point am I actually obeying his word? Because I'm only serving God in direct focus and attention to his word. I'm only worshipping God in direct focus and attention to his word. That that's where the focus be. And therefore you begin to see that another distinction has to be made just so that we can be clear. So I'll pick on myself rather than anyone else in the congregation just to make this distinction. So tomorrow morning after Munchkins is finished and the ladies pack away everything, um, as you know, the chairs are pushed forward and I'll come in and I'll, I'll do a bit of hoovering if it needs it and I'll just put the chairs back and I'll pick up glasses of water that may be hanging around and other things that I find you'd be surprised what you can actually find. Um, how did, oh, you know, nail clippings on the floor for three weeks in a row. And it can't, it can't be from Munchkins because they're up here in the front rows, not, not, uh, I don't know where they came from, but you know, you think, well, you know, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by God's grace, let's clear this up. Okay. I don't mind any of that, but I mustn't, I mustn't believe for a moment that I'm serving God.

I mustn't believe for a moment that putting the church back in order so that it benefits the people of God that I am somehow serving God at that point. It may be tremendously beneficial to the people of God, but an unbeliever could do exactly the same thing. I may do it for God and I ought to do it for God. Whatever I do ought to be done for the glory of God. So in that sense, it is for God.

But the distinction that we need to make is that true service is always in light of his word. And we mustn't ever believe that I'm doing this as this is my offering. Well, God doesn't want your offering. He wants his offering. He wants your life to give what he has given his grace to you for your life to give. He doesn't want you to come up with a substitute. And while someone serving in the church practically, as a deacon, for instance, which are the ones that normally take care of the practical issues of the church, are they serving God? Absolutely. But they are serving God only when they are doing it for the glory of God. So when they Hoover the floor to the glory of God, then it's to God.

God. Because it can be done by anyone. It's that motivation and that desire of why I do what I do. So we are only worshiping God. We're only serving God when God is the motivator for doing what we do.

I can love my wife like an atheist. Or I can love my wife like a Christian man that God expects me to love my wife. Okay? It can be done either way. But there's only one way that's acceptable.

[25 : 31] And some of us fail to see the distinction between those two ways. And so we end up doing it that way, thinking that it pleases God. It doesn't. The proverb that actually makes this clear gives a picture of two farmers out plowing their field. And visually, they're doing exactly the same thing.

Back in the day, of course, they never had tractors, horses, and just a plow behind it. But you've got two men out on the field, plowing their field, and God looks upon one as wicked, and upon the other as righteous. Visually speaking, they're doing exactly the same.

So how can God look upon it and go and say that one is righteous and one is unrighteous? One is acceptable and the other is unacceptable when it's exactly the same action being performed. Well, it's the reason for why that action is being performed. The motivation for it being performed.

But even if you do all of those things, if you're not devoting yourselves to the Word of God, you're still not doing what God is actually calling you to do. The man here devotes himself to the Lord, to the Word of God every day and every night. And when he does, he is like a tree planted by streams of living waters. His roots go down, giving him stability, and his branches go out with fruit on the end. And as I've often said, trees don't eat their own fruit. And what that means is this, that your spiritual devotion to the Lord will either bless someone who is next to you in the congregation of the righteous amongst God's people, because they can feed off your fruitfulness, they can feed off your spiritual blessing that God has given to you through your own devotion, or you have nothing to give.

You're a barren tree, because there is no, you're not like a tree planted by streams of living water. You're known for picking fruit off someone else's tree, but you're not known for providing any of your own. And this isn't a case of, well, he's just a stronger Christian than me, or she's a stronger Christian than me. Well, that, okay. But why are they a stronger Christian? Why do they have that strength? Well, it's because it comes from the Word of God. It comes from the grace of God, that their roots have gone down and their branches have gone out, and fruit is there for the picking.

[28 : 13] And what's happened in a world where the individual is now taken top spot over any other group in the world? The individual is the one that is to be prized, but not in God's world, where he said that when he created one man, that it was not good for him to be alone. If individualism was the way forward, then why just stop with one man? No, it's not good for people to be alone. And it's not good for a number of different reasons which we don't have time to go into. The Christian life is not lived in isolation. It's not to be lived simply by feeding yourself. You are meant to be spiritually strong in order to feed others, because sometimes in the church, some people, as we read in James 5, simply do not have the spiritual muster to conjure up any spiritual strength to even pray.

And they're told to go and get the elders to pray for them. No one else but the elders, but get the elders to pray for them. What happens when a Christian gets themselves into that state, where they're so spiritually on edge that they can't even bring themselves before God in prayer?

And I mean real prayer. I don't mean grace around the table. I don't mean these, you know, these almost visual prayers. I mean you and God on your own, somewhere alone, five minutes, ten minutes.

Okay, but just that. The reason why it's important is because your life depends on it. The stability of your Christian life depends on it. The stability of your relationships with others depend on it.

Relationships break down not due to the weakness of both parties necessarily, but it can do to the weakness of just one party. Someone can be pulling out all the stops in terms of responsibility and effort, but it cannot be met by the other side.

[30 : 43] So what about the blessing of responsibility then is this is where we have come to? Well, for those of you who've read some of my articles, this may sound like a repeat, but this comes straight out of an article that I wrote a few months ago called the blessing of responsibility. And it comes, of course, out of someone in other scriptures. And the blessing of responsibility is demanding, but it is wonderful because it reveals to me that I'm only able to do these things because God has given me the grace to do them. Now, responsibilities can change. You know, we have grandparents or our children have grandparents and the grandparents understand one basic rule, that while the grandchildren are with them, they have certain responsibilities. And when they hand those children back, those responsibilities are handed back with them. So the grandparents have responsibilities when they have the grandchildren and when they hand the grandchildren back, they hand back certain responsibilities like feeding them or putting them to bed on top, whatever the reasons are, you know. And of course, grandchildren always seem to get things with their grandparents that they don't get with their parents. And of course, you have to ask for grace what to do with your outlaws or in-laws. So the question remains of now, now that I know that responsibility is something that I cannot get away with, how much effort should

I make? How much devotion should I do? Where do I actually get my strength from to be responsible? Because sometimes I don't have enough strength or enough desire to actually take the responsibilities that I want to take. And so that kind of question needs to be answered. If I'm called to be responsible before God as a husband, as a father, as whatever else I am and what I do, where do I get the desire and the strength from to be able to do that? Now, I want you to imagine two people. It might be tempting to think that when two people accomplish the same thing, that the same amount of effort was put in because the same result has manifested. Then two people have produced the same thing.

And visually, it looks like, well, it must have taken them the same amount of time. It must have taken them the same amount of effort. But this is confusing. And it's not true because some people can find some things easier than others due to their training, due to how they were brought up, due to how adaptable that they are. That they could actually do something in half the amount of time with half the amount of effort and achieve the same result as someone else does in twice the amount of time and twice the amount of effort. And you cannot look at the result and go, well, the same amount of time and energy must have been used. No, people are different.

And therefore, one person may have needed a whole load more of effort than the other person simply because they're a different person. It may have taken them twice as long. They got there in the end, but they got there in twice the amount of time as the other person did. Because we all don't achieve and accomplish the same things in the same way or in the same time frame because their strengths and weaknesses are different. Now, we shouldn't overlook then the amount of time and effort that someone actually puts in to get good at something.

Why does that person make it look so easy? Well, because they spent 10 years doing it. We shouldn't overlook that either. How is it that some people can go into Sunday school and not get flustered?

[34 : 39] Well, they've got years of training behind them and experience that causes that to happen. And so we shouldn't overlook that either. So the idea that I can accomplish the same thing as someone else doesn't mean that I can simply because of background.

Now, when it comes to the Christian life, however, it seems to me that God's grace is sufficiently given to everyone in order to live the Christian life. It seems to me that the Christian life is the same for everyone. That God doesn't require us to be, you know, that he gives some of us an easier time than others. If the Christian life is thus, then God expects us to live it and he gives us grace to live it. So if I'm to be the husband that God wants me to be, he gives me the grace to be the husband that I'm meant to be. I have to take responsibility, but God gives me the grace to be able to do it.

The same with wives, mothers, sons, and daughters. If we are to be the people that God wants us to be, then it seems to me that God's grace is sufficiently given so that we can be those people.

God's grace is sufficiently given so that we can take the responsibility that I need to take. In order to be that person. Now, if we say we can't do it, or we have reasons for not doing it, then what we're effectively saying is God's grace is not sufficient.

That God's grace is not sufficient enough for me to do this. In other words, you're shifting blame from not taking responsibility onto the grace of God is to say it's not enough.

[36 : 34] God expects more from me than what he gives to me in order to do it. And it's not surprising at all to find that some people can claim a condition so as to remove responsibility.

Now, it is the case that there are some conditions that do remove responsibility. We cannot expect a blind man to be responsible for seeing. And it doesn't matter how much effort he makes, he will not overcome his blindness, however much effort he makes.

His condition is such that he cannot be held responsible for seeing. But it's not the case with all conditions.

But it is the case that some people can claim that they have a condition that then stops them from taking responsibility. And not only that, they're saying that God's grace doesn't sufficiently cover my weaknesses.

That God's grace is not sufficient for me to live this life that God expects me to live. So either it is the case that God's grace is sufficient so that I can live the life that God calls me to live, or it's not sufficient.

[37 : 59] Now, I know that there are some conditions that mean that I cannot go any further because my condition has really limited me. But there are other conditions that people love to claim simply to avoid taking responsibility.

And that's naughty. Really, really naughty. Because God's grace is sufficient. It is always sufficient.

And so while it's true that we cannot expect some things from some people, it's not the case that many people who claim the things that they have that then says, I can't be responsible, is simply a way of avoiding responsibility rather than taking it.

God protects the value of his Christian life that he has given to us with his grace. He protects the value of a Christian husband with grace.

He protects the value of the Christian wife with grace. He protects the value of a Christian family, a church, the people of God with his grace, of which we are responsible in and with and for.

[39 : 09] God's grace is sufficient. God's grace is always sufficient. And so God has a way of protecting the value and meaning of what he has given us.

And he protects it with his grace. But that doesn't mean that I can sit back and, or as the Keswick teaching teaches, let go and let God.

It's not true. God gives me grace to bless me with response ability. So here's the very, very short exhortation. God is worshipped when his word is obeyed.

And God is served when his word is obeyed. And God's grace is sufficiently given so that we can fulfill the responsibilities that God has given us.

As husband, father, mother, wife, children, neighbor, brother, sister. God's grace is sufficient because it's always sufficient.

[40 : 12] And that's the blessing of responsibility. Amen.