

"Two Ways to Walk"

Psalm 1

The book of Psalms is the largest book in our Bibles, containing 150 songs or psalms. It was compiled over a few hundred years, guided by the Spirit of God by holy men of God, and gathered into 5 sections. Each section ends with a doxology;

41:13 Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.

72:18 Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvellous deeds. ¹⁹ Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. ²⁰ This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse.

89:52 Praise be to the Lord forever! Amen and Amen.

106:48 Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the Lord.

And then the last 5 Psalms all have a double doxological 'praise the Lord' that begins and ends the psalms. The compilers of the psalms desired to finish the book intentionally praising the Lord. They also deliberately chose how to begin the psalms. How do we know? Psalms 3-41 are all ascribed to David except two: Ps. 10 (which most feel should have been combined with Ps. 9) and Ps. 33. Psalms 1-2 are not ascribed to any author. Ps. 1 is a wisdom psalm telling us there are only two ways to walk in life – wisely or wickedly – and Ps. 2 is about worshipping God's Son or you will perish. Ps. 1 begins with "blessed is the one who delights in God's Law" and Ps. 2 ends with 'Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.'

Last week we learned from the ten Commandments that God's Word was given to us so that we would enjoy life. Psalm 1 shows us why walking with God is the wise choice but it also points out it's not easy, because there are other voices in life that want our attention and pretend to offer enjoyment but fail to deliver.

So Ps. 1 reminds us that there are only two basic ways to walk in life, therefore:

We Must Choose Wisely How We'll Walk in Life **(Ps. 1:1-3)**

"Blessed" is the one, who ..." the author begins by telling us what he/she doesn't do. That's rather startling if you think about it. We usually describe how we're blessed by our good circumstances: good health, our needs are met, or at least that our situation is far better than others. But God reminds us right away that He describes us as blessed more so by how we live, not so much by our circumstances. And we are blessed, God says, if we do not follow the path of wickedness. Why?

Our choices always lead somewhere (v.1)

When we choose wisely, it will lead us to wiser and more beneficial results. Let's say you're going to do some renovations on your home and you get quotes from different contractors. You listen

to their perspectives and their quotes. If we don't do any homework and check out references, we will assume that the cheapest is the best. So we make that choice, and it may be cheaper because they use inferior materials, pour a weaker foundation, and disguise poor work with paint. Initially it looks good but over time the poorer materials and the shoddy work become evident and things crack, break or even collapse. Quick and cheap, or a 'that will do' attitude pays a heavier price eventually.

Every small wise decision leads us in a direction that moves us towards God, but if done selfishly moves us away from God. And the psalmist paints this picture well in v.1.

Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

Notice the progression when you hang around the wrong kind of counsellors – not professionals but they could be your friends, co-workers, and so-called experts who feed us wrong information or worldly advice. When we listen too much to them we will go from walking with them to stopping and standing with them where you give them more of your attention. That attention could be personal, literature, TV or online. You fixate on some subject that doesn't agree with God's Word and over time you become convinced of this misinformation and you could eventually join the assembly of those who mock wisdom and God's ways.

It can be so subtle. You walk/spend time with someone more than they deserve and you start to question truth. See how our small choices take us somewhere we never thought we'd go.

Earlier, I said the psalmist points out that walking with God is not easy. He writes 'blessed is the man/person" singular who doesn't walk/stand/sit with the plurality of voices who tell us don't walk with God, you're a fool. Look at how many of us are not. Aren't there more of us than you few who are walking with God? This is why the psalmist begins this way "Blessed are you when you don't go this way where everyone else seems to be moving."

"Blessed" here doesn't mean I'm happy because my life situation is comfortable. It means we're content with who we are in God, knowing we are living a purpose-filled life because we know walking with God is right and far more beneficial than the lives of those who mock us and God. It's a positional joy that reminds you through the truth that this is right and good and results in a more satisfactory life now and a great future that is secured for us by God. Who determines who is blessed here? God does. If God says walking with Him means you're blessed, even though it is hard, trust Him and over time you will see how this is always true. Be careful of your choices by being sensitive to the desires of our hearts.

Our choices are determined by our desires (v.2)

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

² *But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

Do we delight and meditate on God's Word every day? Delight means take pleasure. I take pleasure in something because I desire it, I want to experience that. I know this is good for me and will result in fruit. I chew on it; I talk about it. That's what meditate means, a positive regurgitation that I mull over and think about and talk about.

I like listening to the 'Ask Pastor John Piper' podcast where once a week for the last 20+ years he will give biblical answers to questions readers and listeners send him. Recently someone asked

him, 'I read my bible every day and I read it expecting to be wowed by it, but often I walk away not feeling like God "really" spoke to me. Am I missing something?'

John Piper essentially answered, 'Me too!' The daily reading of Scripture is the best habit we can have because we are constantly listening to God, and the steady voice of God will transform our thoughts over time. It's like farming where you plant a seed and water and wait for the fruit. It takes time and patience. And then one day you go, 'Wow, I see the plant starting to grow!' When we read our bibles because it's the right thing to do, we will slowly grow like Jesus because we're listening to the creator of the universe describe how we should look at life and live. Life is a steady, habitual repetition of good productive behaviors punctuated every now and then by 'wow' moments. And living for God and reading His Word are no different. Those wow moments will come when you least expect them because you didn't make it happen, God's Spirit revealed it. Why? Because you are regularly letting Him speak into your life.

God says we're blessed by our godly desires: we enjoy His Word and we're in it everyday and over time we become a healthy, deep-rooted tree because we planted ourselves near the continual nutrition of life-giving water. And we think that this is the goal. Yes but, again our choices always lead us somewhere The reason why reading and meditating on God's Word is likened to a tree planted by a stream of water is because

Our choices prepare us for life's challenges (v.3)

³ *He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

Fruit is seasonal and it's a short season at that. That means there's a lot of time where it is not looking like it is producing fruit. It needs to rest. It needs to be replenished. It needs to grow deep roots where it can reach water when the hot, arid dry seasons come or when the cold harsh winds threaten to destroy it. It's leaf does not wither. It stays on because it is still receiving life-giving water from the deep roots. And the deep roots prevent the tree from losing it's secure foundation.

We have all been recipients of the blessing that this kind of fruit is evident in those people who have cancer right now. Their leaf is not withering because they have rooted themselves in the truths of God and put their trust in Him and are clinging to His promises. Every time we go through a hardship and we trust God and cling to His promises, God says, 'See, that's why I call you blessed. Because you are receiving the life-sustaining, leaves-won't-wither nutrition of the Word and applying it to your life. And others are seeing that fruit showing in your life. And it hasn't been easy because there are so many unwise voices out there who tell you to feel sorry for yourself or blame you for not having enough faith or tell you, just give up and take the easy way out. This is what's going on the psalm. There are only two ways to live. Walk with God or walk with the world. And he comes back to this in v,4

⁴ *Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ⁶For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

There's two choices and here's the 'fruit' of those choices:

We Must Choose Wisely if We Want True Life **(1:4-6)**

The psalmist is laying out the options of each choice. The one is blessed, vs. the many who are cursed. He doesn't use that word but that's a good summary of the Bible. We are all born with a sin nature, meaning we all have a curse hanging over us. "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:23). We need to receive God's gift of life through faith in Him and His Word. Because

Without God we are perishing (vv.4-5, 6b)

If we haven't chosen God, if we haven't asked forgiveness of our sins believing that Jesus alone paid for our sins, we are perishing now. Paul said the same thing about us at one time in Eph. 2:1-4,

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Before we accepted Christ we were objects of wrath because we were under the curse of sin, not knowing or not accepting yet what the truly blessed life looks like. We were the walking dead. I've never seen any of these zombie shows because they lack intelligence, but they are strangely accurate in that all around us are 'the walking dead'. People who are slowly, physically perishing and spiritually unaware of a wiser choice because we haven't been told the gospel or they have but they have rejected it.

They won't stand in the judgment. They are like chaff which blows away from the husk of the wheat when it's harvest time. There is nothing of substance to them, even though they may be popular, rich, beautiful, athletic, smart or successful. God's assessment; they are fluff. They are a withered leaf that is easily blown away. The way of unbelief, no matter how shiny or pretty, God says it's wicked. Which sounds so harsh because we have redefined 'wicked' as the exceptional sinners. God says sinners are sinners and all sinners are wicked because they have chosen to live for what's dying, not for what's living.

⁶For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous

With God in our life we flourish (v.6a)

'Watches over' is also translated 'know'

God knows the way of the righteous'

It's the same word used when Adam "knew" his wife. It's the word that God uses here to describe His 'blesseds' intimate, protective, caring relationship. Because God knows us He watches over us. We are secure in Him if we have placed our faith in Him and His Son. Psalm 2:12 points ultimately forward to Jesus reminding us to

¹² *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

'Destroyed' in 2:12 is the same Hebrew word as 'perish' here in 1:6. And then 'blessed' again are those who take refuge in Him, a reminder that He's there to protect us and guide us safely and ultimately into standing in His presence one day.

Psalm 1 invites us to live the blessed life, a life of living for God is the most satisfying now and will have the greatest benefits in eternity. The psalm also reminds us we're outnumbered; blessed is the one who refuses to listen and walk with the many wicked. But there are others of us. V.6 tells us there is an assembly of the righteous. So listen to God, walk together with fellow 'blessed' followers of God's way. A similar intro to the longest psalm echoes Psalm 1.

Ps. 119 begins,

- ¹ *Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.*
² *Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. ³ They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.*
⁴ *You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.*
⁵ *Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!*
⁶ *Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.*
⁷ *I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.*
⁸ *I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.*

Notice the desires of his heart are to walk blamelessly with God, yet he recognizes his desires don't always match his actions. I think we can relate to that. We know we're blessed by God because of our security in Him through faith in His Son. We know that living blamelessly is our desire but we still listen to the unwise voices around us and our own sinful, selfish desires that keep whispering 'this way is better'. 'Oh that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees.' "Oh that we would make wise choices today, delighting and chewing on your Word, so we would show a lost world what a blessed life really looks like, and they will want it too.

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