

TWO WAYS TO LIVE

Psalm 1

Introduction:

Well, here we are – the second Sunday of the new year. As I was considering what to speak on for the next while, my good wife made a wonderful suggestion. She said, why don't you do some messages from the Psalms. You know, some words of encouragement. We live in turbulent times. Not only in the world in general, but I know that for many of you, there are turbulent things going on in your own lives. There are health issues, financial issues, family concerns.

The book of Psalms is really a book of poetry. They are poems which became hymns or songs for the Hebrew people of ancient times. Out of the 150 poems which make up the book of Psalms which we have in our Bibles, approximately half of them are identified as having been written by David. Another 25 or so are attributed to other authors – the Sons of Korah (11), Asaph (12), Solomon (possibly 2) and Moses (1). The rest do not have any author identified.

The book of Psalms, or Psalter, has been the source of much comfort to believers over the centuries. Many of the most beloved Bible passages come from the Psalms—passages like:

- Psalm 23 – “The Lord is my shepherd...”
- Psalm 5 – “Give ear to my words, O LORD, Consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, For to You I will pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; In the morning I will direct [it] to You, And I will look up.”
- Psalm 40 – “I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, [And] established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth--Praise to our God; Many will see [it] and fear, And will trust in the LORD.”

- Psalm 103 – “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name!”

I think that one of the reasons we find so much comfort and encouragement from the Psalms is that the psalmist did not gloss over the difficult times. Clearly David, who wrote so many of the psalms, understood the darkness of despair and discouragement. In many of his psalms he begins by crying out with exclamations of anguish, of discouragement, even despair. Sometimes he even rails against God with complaints and accusations. But in almost every case, as he turns his eyes on God, his outlook changes, his attitude is turned around and he ends up worshipping and praising God for his goodness even in the midst of trial and difficulty.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to take a look at some of these psalms. We are certainly not going to do an exhaustive study of the book of Psalms, but I want to pick a few that I believe would be of benefit to us. We can all use some encouragement now and then, and the psalmist has a way of turning our eyes toward God so that we see his blessing and his goodness.

So this morning we are going to begin this series with a look at Psalm 1. This wisdom psalm basically functions as an introduction to the entire book of Psalms. Its theme is as big as the whole Bible because it tells of people, paths, and ultimate destinations. By a series of contrasts, Ps. 1 separates all people into two spiritual categories: the righteous and the wicked or ungodly.

This morning as we look at this psalm we are going to see three contrasts between the righteous and the ungodly. These contrasts ultimately portray two ways to live and challenge us to decide which way we are going to take. So let's get started.

I. Contrasting Outlook

The first thing we notice is the contrast in what is truly important and where a person looks for the direction and guidance needed in life. That word blessed refers to the person who is truly happy because of the favor which God has showered on him. It is a deep-seated sense of joy because God has been good.

And the truly happy person is the person who is not guided by the counsel and guidance of the world.

There is a kind of progression here in v. 1 which illustrates the way of the person who looks to the world for his wisdom in life. In fact there are two kinds of progression.

“wicked” or “ungodly” – the person who is hostile toward God; the one who has no regard for God or the truth of God.

“sinners” – those who have, by their attitudes and actions, offended the righteousness of God and, as a consequence, face judgment and condemnation.

“scoffers” or “mockers” – the person who not only has offended God, but openly and arrogantly boasts about it, and scoffs at the idea of judgment for his unrighteous living.

So, you have a progression of thought in the extent or degree of sinfulness in the heart of the unrighteous. But there is also a progression in the way in which a person gets drawn into sinfulness when they look to the world and the ungodly for their counsel and advice.

Walk ... stand ... sit – the ungodly begin by following the way of unrighteousness, of wickedness, but as time goes on they become more and more settled and satisfied with the thinking and the counsel of the world and all that opposes God.

By contrast, the blessed person, the one who is truly happy, is the one who does not go that way. He does not look to the world and the counsel of the wicked for advice. He does not become trapped in that downward spiral of sin and degradation. Rather, he looks to the real source of truth for the counsel that is needed to guide his life.

Look at vs. 2 – The truly happy person is the one who delights in the truth of God. The ungodly and those who follow the counsel of the world find themselves opposed to the truth of God. But the one who is blessed by God is the one who is focused on the truth of God. The spiritually “happy” man is characterized by the consistent contemplation and internalization of God’s word for ethical direction and obedience.

Meditate - describes an active pondering, perhaps even muttering to oneself in pursuit of insight (*ESV Study Bible*). The ideal that is portrayed here is that we are to face every situation, however mundane, with a view to pleasing the Lord by knowing and following his Word.

So, the first contrast is in one’s focus when it comes to counsel and direction in life. The ungodly oppose the truth and seek the counsel of those who would ignore, oppose or even mock the truth of God. The truly blessed person, however, seeks direction, counsel and guidance from the truth of God’s Word, which is his instruction to us.

II. Contrasting Output

The second contrast shows us the difference in what results from the life of those who focus on worldly counsel and those who focus on the Word of God. There is a big difference in the fruitfulness or lasting value of these two different ways to live our lives.

The psalmist illustrates this with two different pictures based on agriculture in ancient Palestine, which describe the effects of the two kinds of people.

The first picture, illustrating the life of the godly is that of a tree in a dry climate, which nevertheless thrives because of its constant supply of water. A tree bears fruit, not for itself, but for others; thus, when the faithful prospers, it is not for himself, nor is the prospering even necessarily material, but he succeeds in bringing benefit to others.

A similar image is used in the book of Jeremiah - “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:7-8 ESV)

Verse 4 gives a very sharp contrast to the fruitfulness of the one who pursues the truth of God. “The wicked are not so...” lit. “Not so the wicked...” The ungodly, those who seek direction and guidance from sources other than the truth of God, do not have that fruitful life. In fact, the psalmist indicates they have nothing to offer that is of value.

Unlike the godly, who are like fruitful trees, these have nothing to offer from their lives. They are like the chaff which the wind drives away. You all know what chaff is... *Discuss the process of threshing in the time of the OT.*

So there is an incredible contrast in the output or fruitfulness of the lives of these two kinds of people. The godly have lives that are fruitful, productive and prosperous because they have a source of nourishment that is always abundant. The ungodly are fruitless and unproductive, because they have no source of nourishment. They have no supply by which to bear fruit. As a consequence, their lives are dry and empty.

Contrasting outlook ... contrasting output... there is one more...

III. Contrasting Outcome

In the final two verses of this psalm we have laid out for us the end result of these two ways of life. These two verses lead us to reflect on where these two kinds of life are headed, showing that God will make the contrast last forever. There are eternal consequences to the life choices we make today.

Read v. 5 – clearly there is coming a day when there will be a judgment – a separating of the righteous and the wicked. We are told in Eccl. 12:14, “For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.” In that final judgment, some will be allowed to enter the congregation of the righteous, while others will be excluded. The wicked will have no place with those who have followed the leading and instruction of God in his word.

Verse 6 set out the distinction clearly and succinctly. Read it – the Lord knows – more than simply recognition. One commentator says:

In this context, the reference is to personal intimacy and involvement with his righteous ones. The repetition of the phrase, “the way of” picks up on the “path” imagery so characteristic of this psalm. It refers to one’s total course of life, i.e., lifestyle. Here these two courses arrive at the ways of life and death. One day the wicked person’s way will end in ruin; a new order is coming and it will be a righteous order. So Ps. 1 begins with the “blessed” and ends with those who “perish.”

Conclusion

Two ways to live:

One focused on the counsel of the world, the other on the truth of God. One fruitless and unproductive, the other prosperous and fruitful even in times of drought. One ending in fellowship with God, in the congregation of the righteous, the other passing away into eternal destruction.

In the coming weeks we want to look more at the encouragement that the psalmist offers to those who walk with God, but today we must end with the question: which way are you on?

Two ways to live, with two very different ends. Please do not make the wrong choice.