

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, June 20, 2021

Blessed is the Man – Psalms 1

Colossians 3:16 *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”*

My friends, the Lord has supplied us with a treasure trove of wisdom within the Psalms. These ancient songs were breathed by the Holy Spirit, and recorded by our faithful forefathers. They are of great use to read, study, speak, sing, and apply to our lives. Their very essence gives praise to God; further, they contain endless instruction, admonition, and comfort for us as we make our pilgrim journey in this world. The general topic of the Psalms deserves more attention, but today, we will look for wisdom in the first Psalm.

Psalms 1:1-6 *“1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”*

It is noteworthy that God, in His wisdom, caused this to be the first Psalm. Here we see a clear distinction between the path of the righteous and the path of the wicked; the path that leads to heaven, and the path that leads to hell. If we hope to find help and comfort from the rest of the Psalms – indeed, the rest of the blessings and promises of God – then we must forsake the path of the world, and stay upon the path of the blessed. If we refuse to be obedient to these clear instructions, then we have no claim on the blessings, and we have no expectation that God will hear our prayers.

Thomas Watson: *“This Psalm carries blessedness in the frontpiece; it begins where we all hope to end: it may well be called a Christian’s Guide, for it discovers the quicksands where the wicked sink down in perdition, and the firm ground on which the saints tread to glory.”*

Matthew Henry: *“This is a psalm of instruction concerning good and evil, setting before us life and death, the blessing and the curse, that we may take the right way which leads to happiness and avoid that which will certainly end in our misery and ruin. The different*

character and condition of godly people and wicked people, those that serve God and those that serve him not, is here plainly stated in a few words; so that every man, if he will be faithful to himself, may here see his own face and then read his own doom. That division of the children of men into saints and sinners, righteous and unrighteous, the children of God and the children of the wicked one, as it is ancient, ever since the struggle began between sin and grace, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, so it is lasting, and will survive all other divisions and subdivisions of men into high and low, rich and poor, bond and free; for by this men's everlasting state will be determined, and the distinction will last as long as heaven and hell."

We must be clear, and ever-vigilant on this point: there is only one division amongst men – those that are loved and chosen of God vs those that are hated and rejected of God. Satan prompts us to align with various other divisions of our flesh, but it is godless folly! As soon as we align our hearts, words, and actions around a fleshly cause, with a subset of humans (gender, race, family, etc.), we are in danger of turning away from the clear path of righteousness that God has put before us. Don't do it! Instead, make a clear distinction between those that serve God, and those that do not – make your company with the saints; depart from the people of the world, and above all, cleave to Christ!

1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

When a verse starts with the word "blessed", we ought to pay close attention. This word translated "blessed" comes from a plural noun in the Hebrew: blessednesses. Blessednesses flow to this man – and **only** to this man of God. Blessednesses are his portion; all things are well with this man.

Henry: "In general, he is blessed. God blesses him, and that blessing will make him happy. Blessednesses are to him, blessings of all kinds, of the upper and nether springs, enough to make him completely happy; none of the ingredients of happiness shall be wanting to him. When the psalmist undertakes to describe a blessed man, he describes a good man; for, after all, those only are happy, truly happy, that are holy, truly holy; and we are more concerned to know the way to blessedness than to know wherein that blessedness will consist. Nay, goodness and holiness are not only the way to happiness, but happiness itself; supposing there were not another life after this, yet that man is a happy man that keeps in the way of his duty."

Who receives these blessings? This Psalm identifies the blessed by their behavior. Certainly God knows them that are His (2Tim 2:19), but how do **we** know who walks this path of blessedness? We can only know a man by his fruit; further, we can only know

ourselves by our own fruit! There can never be a time that we get to rest on our past behavior; we must continue to be doers of the word of God, and not just hearers. Put another way: we can have no confidence in our own salvation if we are not actively submitting our lives in obedience to Christ. Good talk is not sufficient – it must be the work of our lives to do those things that the scriptures tell us to do. Which “map” we choose to guide our lives is a foundational decision that must be answered anew each day: will we be guided by the wisdom of the world, or the word of God? Looking to the wrong guide is a fatal error that leads to the wrong destination.

This first verse identifies the negative behavior – the behavior of the wicked – the behavior that belongs to those with no claims on the blessings of God. Notice first, that this description encompasses all of the aspects of our waking lives: walking, standing, sitting. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we must keep godliness before our eyes; we must resist our flesh, and sow to the Spirit of God that dwells in us, so that our behavior is fitting for those that proclaim a love of Christ. Notice also, that this description of wicked behavior is a progression: ungodly, sinner, scorner.

- **Henry:** “He sees evil-doers round about him; the world is full of them; they walk on every side. They are here described by three characters, ungodly, sinners, and scornful. See by what steps men arrive at the height of impiety. They are ungodly first, casting off the fear of God and living in the neglect of their duty to him: but they rest not there. When the services of religion are laid aside, they come to be sinners, that is, they break out into open rebellion against God and engage in the service of sin and Satan. Omissions make way for commissions, and by these the heart is so hardened that at length they come to be scorners, that is, they openly defy all that is sacred, scoff at religion, and make a jest of sin. Thus is the way of iniquity down-hill; the bad grow worse, sinners themselves become tempters to others and advocates for Baal. The word which we translate ungodly signifies such as are unsettled, aim at no certain end and walk by no certain rule, but are at the command of every lust and at the beck of every temptation. The word for sinners signifies such as are determined for the practice of sin and set it up as their trade. The scornful are those that set their mouths against the heavens. These the good man sees with a sad heart; they are a constant vexation to his righteous soul. But, he shuns them wherever he sees them. He does not do as they do; and, that he may not, he does not converse familiarly with them.”

Some additional thoughts:

- The “counsel of the ungodly”:
 - If we keep clear eyes on the only division that matters amongst men, then we know that we should not be looking to any of the people of this world to be our counselors. Satan would deceive us to believe that their counsel is

wonderful, wise, and leads to prosperity and happiness. No! There is death in that pot! Worldly wisdom produces friends of the world; friends of the world are the enemies of Christ. (**James 4:4**)

- **Henry:** *“First, because they will not humble themselves so far as to walk in the law of the Lord, but rule themselves by their own counsel. And then he calls it their “counsel,” because it is their prudence, and the way that seems to them to be without error. For this is the destruction of the ungodly—their being prudent in their own eyes and in their own esteem, and clothing their errors in the garb of prudence and of the right way. For if they came to men in the open garb of error, it would not be so distinguishing a mark of blessedness not to walk with them. But David does not here say, “in the folly of the ungodly,” or “in the error of the ungodly;” and therefore he admonishes us to guard with all diligence against the appearance of what is right, that the devil transformed into an angel of light do not seduce us by his craftiness. And he contrasts the counsel of the wicked with the law of the Lord, that we may learn to beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing, who are always ready to give counsel to all, to teach all, and to offer assistance unto all, when they are of all men least qualified to do so.”*

- Clearly we cannot seek counsel from the ungodly. Beyond that, we must be vigilant, knowing that they thrust their counsel at us even when we don’t seek it. It is subtle, and constant. We should do what we can to avoid hearing their counsel at all, but ultimately that will fail. We will hear their words, but what will we do with them? Notice that the verse tells us not to **walk** in their counsel. *“There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.”* (**Mark 7:15**)
- We must test everything that we hear against the scriptures, and against **godly counselors**, rather than accept them at face value. If you don’t believe that seeking and heeding godly counsel is a necessary part of your being, then you are proudly rejecting the scriptures, and the doctrine and purpose of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are headed for destruction. *“Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.”* (**Proverbs 11:14**) If you are your own counselor, then you are a fool. *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”* (**Proverbs 12:15**) If you carefully and quietly “get counsel” from those that 1) have no applicable experience, and 2) are likely to give you the answer that you want to hear, then you deceive yourself, because that is no counsel at all.

- Scorners:

- Clearly we cannot join in with those that scorn and mock at God and righteousness. However, we have to apply this to ourselves, and take great care that we don't be scorers in our general thoughts and conversation. It is the way of the wicked to make a mock of anything and everything – we must bridle our tongues, and speak those things that are good for edifying. *“29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” (Ephesians 4:29)* This is an easy trap to fall into; our flesh loves to find fault, and put ourselves above others. We must walk and talk in meekness before God.

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

In our flesh, we are hopeless; if we are judged by the law of God, then we will fail miserably, because we are ungodly, sinners, and scorers from birth. Given that hopeless condition, we delight to dwell upon Christ – our hope and the Captain of our Salvation. Our sins have separated us from God, but we have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, and brought back into communion with God; Christ purchased everlasting life for us when He walked sinless on this earth, and then gave Himself to be killed at the hands of His creation. We delight in the depth of His love, and riches of His grace. We delight to look into the law of God as a light for our feet, and as pleasing our Master.

It's not enough to depart from iniquity. There are many ways that the people of the world “depart from iniquity” (at least to some extent), because of their own view of “morality”; but that is not godliness. God's people delight in His law, and meditate upon it. I submit that we do that in at least the following ways:

- **Praying** – by which we have direct access to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and the throne of God, wherein He has promised to guide us into all truth. **(John 16:13)**
- **Reading / studying the scriptures** – by which we have access to the revealed Word of God, which He supplied *“for our learning, so that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)*
- **Speaking with our co-elect** – by which we have access to the experience, instruction and comfort of those precious few souls in this earth who likewise meditate in the law of God. **(Philippians 3:17)** If we are to avoid the counsel of the ungodly, then how much should we run to the counsel of the saints?
 - The Hebrew word translated “meditate” is elsewhere translated as: speak, imagine, study, mutter, utter, roar, talk.
- **Applying our learning to the things that happen in our lives:** When things come up in our lives (decisions, afflictions, confusion, sorrow, joy, etc), we cannot view them through the eyes of flesh, we have to actively put godliness before our

eyes, so that we see those events aright, and react accordingly. How do we do this? See bullets 1, 2, and 3 above.

Charles Spurgeon: *"And now mark his positive character. "His delight is in the law of the Lord." He is not under the law as a curse and condemnation, but he is in it, and he delights to be in it as his rule of life; he delights, moreover, to meditate in it, to read it by day, and think upon it by night. He takes a text and carries it with him all day long; and in the night-watches, when sleep forsakes his eyelids, he museth upon the Word of God. In the day of his prosperity he sings psalms out of the Word of God, and in the night of his affliction he comforts himself with promises out of the same book. "The law of the Lord" is the daily bread of the true believer. And yet, in David's day, how small was the volume of inspiration, for they had scarcely anything save the first five books of Moses! How much more, then, should we prize the whole written Word which it is our privilege to have in all our houses! But, alas, what ill-treatment is given to this angel from heaven! Perhaps some of you can claim a sort of negative purity, because you do not walk in the way of the ungodly; but let me ask you—Is your delight in the law of God? Do you study God's Word? Do you make it the man of your right hand—your best companion and hourly guide? If not, this blessing belongeth not to you."*

Henry: *"Here is, a godly man, that he may do that which is good and cleave to it, submits to the guidance of the word of God and makes that familiar to him. This is that which keeps him out of the way of the ungodly and fortifies him against their temptations. By the words of thy lips I have kept me from the path of the deceiver. We need not court the fellowship of sinners, either for pleasure or for improvement, while we have fellowship with the word of God and with God himself in and by his word. When thou awakest it shall talk with thee. What we love we love to think of. To meditate in God's word is to discourse with ourselves concerning the great things contained in it, with a close application of mind, a fixedness of thought, till we be suitably affected with those things and experience the savour and power of them in our hearts. This we must do day and night; we must have a constant habitual regard to the word of God as the rule of our actions and the spring of our comforts, and we must have it in our thoughts, accordingly, upon every occasion that occurs, whether night or day. No time is amiss for meditating on the word of God, nor is any time unseasonable for those visits."*

3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Spurgeon: *" "And he shall be like a tree planted"—not a wild tree, but "a tree planted," chosen, considered as property, cultivated and secured from the last terrible uprooting, for "every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up:" Matthew*

15:13. *"By the rivers of water;" so that even if one river should fail, he hath another. The rivers of pardon and the rivers of grace, the rivers of the promise and the rivers of communion with Christ, are never-failing sources of supply. He is "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season;" not unseasonable graces, like untimely figs, which are never full-flavored. But the man who delights in God's Word, being taught by it, bringeth forth patience in the time of suffering, faith in the day of trial, and holy joy in the hour of prosperity. Fruitfulness is an essential quality of a gracious man, and that fruitfulness should be seasonable. He shall neither lose his beauty nor his fruitfulness. "And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Blessed is the man who hath such a promise as this. But we must not always estimate the fulfillment of a promise by our own eye-sight. How often, my brethren, if we judge by feeble sense, may we come to the mournful conclusion of Jacob, "All these things are against me!" For though we know our interest in the promise, yet we are so tried and troubled, that sight sees the very reverse of what that promise foretells. But to the eye of faith this word is sure, and by it we perceive that our works are prospered, even when everything seems to go against us. It is not outward prosperity which the Christian most desires and values; it is soul prosperity which he longs for. It is often for the soul's health that we would be poor, bereaved, and persecuted. Our worst things are often our best things. As there is a curse wrapped up in the wicked man's mercies, so there is a blessing concealed in the righteous man's crosses, losses, and sorrows. The trials of the saint are a divine husbandry, by which he grows and brings forth abundant fruit."*

Adam Clarke: *"He who reads, prays, and meditates, will ever see the work which God has given him to do; the power by which he is to perform it; and the times, places, and opportunities for doing those things by which God can obtain most glory, his own soul most good, and his neighbour most edification."*

Martin Luther: *"In his season." Oh, golden and admirable word! by which is asserted the liberty of Christian righteousness. The ungodly have their stated days, stated times, certain works, and certain places; to which they stick so closely, that if their neighbours were perishing with hunger, they could not be torn from them. But this blessed man, being free at all times, in all places, for every work, and to every person, will serve you whenever an opportunity is offered him; whatsoever comes into his hands to do, he does it. He is neither a Jew, nor a Gentile, nor a Greek, nor a barbarian, nor of any other particular person. He gives his fruit in his season, so often as either God or man requires his work. Therefore his fruits have no name, and his times have no name."*

4 The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Henry: *“In general, they are the reverse of the righteous, both in character and condition: They are not so. The Septuagint emphatically repeats this: Not so the ungodly; they are not so; they are led by the counsel of the wicked, in the way of sinners, to the seat of the scornful; they have no delight in the law of God, nor ever think of it; they bring forth no fruit but grapes of Sodom; they cumber the ground. In particular, whereas the righteous are like valuable, useful, fruitful trees, they are like the chaff which the wind drives away, the very lightest of the chaff, the dust which the owner of the floor desires to have driven away, as not capable of being put to any use. Would you value them? Would you weigh them? They are like chaff, of no worth at all in God’s account, how highly soever they may value themselves. Would you know the temper of their minds? They are light and vain; they have no substance in them, no solidity; they are easily driven to and fro by every wind and temptation, and have no steadfastness. Would you know their end? The wrath of God will drive them away in their wickedness, as the wind does the chaff, which is never gathered nor looked after more. The chaff may be, for a while, among the wheat; but he is coming whose fan is in his hand and who will thoroughly purge his floor. Those that by their own sin and folly make themselves as chaff will be found so before the whirlwind and fire of divine wrath (#Ps 35:5), so unable to stand before it or to escape it, #Isa 17:13.”*

5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

Spurgeon: *“Well may the saints long for heaven, for no evil men shall dwell there, “nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” All our congregations upon earth are mixed. Every Church hath one devil in it. The tares grow in the same furrows as the wheat. There is no floor which is as yet thoroughly purged from chaff. Sinners mix with saints, as dross mingles with gold. God’s precious diamonds still lie in the same field with pebbles. Righteous Lots are this side heaven continually vexed by the men of Sodom. Let us rejoice then, that in “the general assembly and church of the firstborn” above, there shall by no means be admitted a single unrenewed soul. [Unregenerated] sinners cannot live in heaven. They would be out of their element. Sooner could a fish live upon a tree than the wicked in Paradise. May God grant that we may have a name and a place in his courts above!”*

6 For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Henry: *“God must have all the glory of the prosperity and happiness of the righteous. They are blessed because the Lord knows their way; he chose them into it, inclined them to choose it, leads and guides them in it, and orders all their steps. Sinners must bear all the blame of their own destruction. Therefore the ungodly perish, because the very way in which they have chosen and resolved to walk leads directly to destruction; it naturally tends*

towards ruin and therefore must necessarily end in it.. Let this support the drooping spirits of the righteous, that the Lord knows their way, knows their hearts (#Jer 12:3), knows their secret devotions (#Mt 6:6), knows their character, how much soever it is blackened and blemished by the reproaches of men, and will shortly make them and their way manifest before the world, to their immortal joy and honour. Let this cast a damp upon the security and jollity of sinners, that their way, though pleasant now, will perish at last. In singing these verses, and praying over them, let us possess ourselves with a holy dread of the wicked man's portion, and deprecate it with a firm and lively expectation of the judgment to come, and stir up ourselves to prepare for it, and with a holy care to approve ourselves to God in every thing, entreating his favour with our whole hearts."

Colossians 3:16,17 *"16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."*