



The Lord Knows

Psalm 1

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
² But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
³ He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.
⁴ The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
⁶ For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

Main idea: God knows and rewards the way of the righteous and condemns the way of the wicked.

Introduction:

I like that story Charles Spurgeon told about the woman in his first congregation at Waterbeach. He called her *Mrs. Much-afraid*. She was always doubting and fearing over her spiritual condition, though she had been a believer for fifty years and showed all the fruit of genuine faith. She was faithful in worship, helpful to neighbors, and willing to speak to the unconverted. One day they were talking, and she declared she had no hope, no faith and feared she was a hypocrite. So, Spurgeon told her to quit coming to chapel, because "we don't want hypocrites there."

He asked her why she came. She replied, "I come because I can't stay away. I love the people of God; I love the house of God; and I love to worship God." Spurgeon assured her that she was an odd sort of hypocrite. As the conversation moved on, he asked if she had any hope at all. "No," she said. So, Spurgeon pulled out his wallet, and said: "Now, I have five pounds here; it is all the money I have, but I will give you that five pounds for your hope if you would sell it." She looked at him, evidently puzzled, but then exclaimed, "Why! I would not sell it for a thousand worlds." And Spurgeon's editorial comment was: She had told me that she had not any hope of salvation, yet she would not sell it for a thousand worlds! In short, her instinct assumed what her words denied. In other words, her actions said one thing, her words and feelings said another.

In every gathering of public worship, there are two groups of people: there are those whose *lifestyle deny what their words assume*, and those whose *desires and actions prove what their lips profess*. Which is true of you?

Psalm 1 provides a Scriptural template for every soul to know *which group you're in* and *which road you're on*. It not only *provides a template*, but it also **presents a serious choice**, and the road you choose will mark the course of your life. Jesus called it "*the broad road and the narrow road*" (Matt.7:13-14). The Psalmist calls it "*the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked*." One leads to *life*, the other to *death*, one brings *blessing*, the other *cursing*. Some make the discovery of which road they're on in this life; others do not make that discover until it's too late in eternity (Matt.7:22-23).

For this reason, James Montgomery Boice called Psalm 1 a "*practical psalm*." Charles Spurgeon called it a "*preface psalm*." Basil said, "What the foundation is to a house...and the heart is to an animal; the same is this Psalm to the whole Book. It is a preface [precursor, introduction, foreword] to the Psalter."¹ Psalm 1 rightly belongs to the category of a "*wisdom psalm*," because it **introduces us** to the way in which we find happiness and fulfillment in life. Psalm 1 also **warns us** of a sure, eventual, and eternal ruin if we do not. As we enter the sanctuary of the psalms to worship and petition the Lord, the intention of the Psalmist is to help us understand this:

- *NOTHING is more important than making sure that you belong to the assembly of the righteous.*

The Context:

Let me set the book in its context. Dr. Steven J. Lawson points out that "Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 stand together with a literary device called "*inclusion*." Notice, Psalm 1, verse 1 begins, "*How blessed is the man...*" Psalm 2, verse 12, which is the end of Psalm 2, concludes with virtually the same language, "*How blessed are all who take refuge in Him.*" These are like bookends that bracket the first and the second Psalm together. Psalm 1 makes the

¹ Plummer, p.27

contrast between those who are righteous and wicked, Psalm 2 follows up and gives a description of the wicked and at the end it calls the wicked to *"kiss the Son and give Him homage."*

Together, they are intentionally designed to be evangelistic so that every time one would come to a public house of worship, there would be the recognition of a careful discrimination by God. God recognizes the blessed and the cursed.² He knows our way.

Psalms 1 and 2 work like "ushers" opening the doors to the worship of God by reminding us that *acceptable worship and a blessed life are only possible through the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Exposition:

Psalm 1 breaks easily into two parts: in verses 1-3, we see *the way of righteous*. In verses 4-6, it is contrasted with *the way of the wicked*. Notice, there is no *Selah* notation—which was a musical interlude to signal to the congregation to pause and meditate. This may suggest that the message was urgent and needed to be applied at once. Let us step into the Psalm by first considering...

A. The Way of the Righteous (vv.1-3)

- How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
² But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
³ He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

There are four marks that the Psalmist reveals to us about the way of the righteous. 1) He is *satisfied in the Lord*, 2) *separated from the world*, 3) *saturated with the Scripture*, and 4) *supplied by the Lord*.

The Psalmist begins just like Jesus did with the Sermon on the Mount, with a pronouncement of blessing—**"How blessed is the man..."** In Matthew 5:3, *"Blessed are..."* Now, just the mention of that word "blessed" in our culture demands a definition. The other day in Walmart, I saw a young lady with a t-shirt on that said, *"Blessed."* I wanted to ask her, "What do you mean by blessed? Do you mean lots of money? No troubles? A nice family? A good job? A model home, a sweet ride, recognizable talents, good friends, a big dog? What in the world do you mean by blessed?"

When my youngest son Josh was in high school, he and his buddy had one of those rare, brief philosophical discussions about the value of material things. And if I remember the conversation correctly, Josh said to his friend, "Dude, you are spoiled," to which he replied, "I'm not spoiled, I'm blessed." What is the blessed man and what distinguished him/her from the person who is not?

² Sermonaudio, *The Blessed and the Cursed*

1. **What is the blessed man?**

The Hebrew word "**blessed**" means *deep-seated joy*. It can be translated: to be *inwardly satisfied*, not necessarily from a full stomach, but to be satisfied "in union and communion with the Lord." The plural is used which intensifies its meaning. This word is used 26 times in the Psalter, and Jesus carries this term over from the Old Testament and unpacks its meaning in this term "blessed" (makarios) in the gospels (*Matt.5:3-11; 11:6; 13:16; 16:17; 24:46*). Expressed with strong emotion as it reflects on the subject, the use of the plural may also denote a *fullness and variety of blessings*. It announces the rich variety of blessings secured to the righteous. Literally, it can be translated, "*Oh, the happiness...the right goings, the happy progress of the man...or the blessedness of the man...*"

An example of this expression is found in the story of the queen of Sheba and her visit to King Solomon in 1 Kings 10:1-10. (Read)

The blessed man is not necessarily the man which great wealth. The Word of God clearly explains in...

- Ps.32:1—The blessed man is *the man whose sin has been forgiven*.
- Ps.119:1-2—The blessed man is *the man whose way is blameless/who walks with the Lord*.
- Prov.14:21—The blessed man is *the generous man*.
- Prov.16:20—The blessed man is the man *who gives attention to the Word and trusts in God*.
- Prov.20:7—The blessed man is *the man who walks in integrity/whose sons walks after Him*.
- Prov.28:14—The blessed man is *the man who walks in the fear of the Lord*.

That is *what* the blessed man is. He is one who *satisfied in the Lord*. The opening statement, "How blessed is the man..." is emphatic in the Hebrew psalter, which means that "this man and no one else is blessed." He is *internally and supernaturally* content and happy. He is genuinely satisfied in the Lord.

Application: Salvation is more than paperwork in heaven. It is more than having our sin placed on Christ and His righteousness imputed to our account in heaven so that God accepts you (*2 Cor.5:21*). This is true. But there is an additional work that goes on in the heart here on earth. It is something that the world can never give and never offer. It is a *genuine satisfaction and happiness of heart*. Has this work taken place in you? Are you *enduring religion or enjoying a relationship with Christ*? We used to sing in the old Baptist church,

*Heaven came down and glory filled my soul,
When at the cross the Savior made me whole,
My sins were washed away,
My night was turned to day,
Heaven came down and glory filled my soul.³*

Are you happy today because Christ lives within your heart? This is what the blessed man is...but WHO is this man? Aren't we all dying to know?

³ John W. Peterson, *Heaven Came Down*

2. Who is the blessed man?

The Psalmist describes *the blessed man* by *three consecutive negatives* and *one positive*. Here we see the beauty of Hebrew parallelism. In route to telling us what who he is, he tells us what he is not. It is designed to have a hard-cutting edge to it, to clearly mark out who the blessed man is. The blessed man is not only one who is *satisfied in the Lord*, but he is also *separated from the world*.

- How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

Notice how the writer draws the parallel in the first three lines. The three verbs **“walk...stand...sit”** are in the perfect tense, which means this is a pattern of their lives and a downhill course. Then, he uses three clauses *“counsel of the wicked, path of the sinner, seat of the scoffer.”*

Spurgeon said, “When men are living in sin, they go from bad to worse.” It’s like a slippery slope. First, you start listening to their counsel, then you are standing with those who openly defy God’s law, then finally, you end up comfortable taking your seat on the couch with those who mock God.

Application: some listening may say, “the way of the sinner looks attractive, Pastor! They seem to be having *fun*; they are not restricted by *rules* or *religion*; they really know how to party!” But dear friends, hear the psalmist warning us that what seems wonderful and exciting is actually on the fast track to emptiness and frustration here and judgment in the life to come.

Who is the blessed man?

5

First, he does not **“walk in the counsel of the wicked”** which means that blessed man does not advance or educate himself in the opinions, advice, principles, or practice of men who reject the truth of God’s Word. In other words, he does not inundate his thinking with worldly beliefs, secular philosophy, and humanistic values of the godless.

Second, he does not **“stand in the path of sinners,”** or he has not adopted for the standing or establishing of his rule of life—the ways, the customs, or the principles of men who disobey God. This speaks of *worldly activity*. He knows the difference between having bad acquaintances and wicked companions. He seeks no intimacy with them as his companions, and if he mingles with them, they are a grief to him because their personal behavior resists God’s ways.

Third, he does not **“sit in the seat of the scoffers!”** In the Scripture, scorning expresses an indifference and hatred of the wicked toward divine things. This tells us that the righteous man is not settled where scathing unbelief is voiced and held to.

If you bring all of these clauses together, then we see that the blessed man is seen by...

- *the cues he follows,*
- *the direction he takes, and*
- *the company he enjoys.*

Application: So, what does the happy man, the blessed man, the righteous man really look like? How would you describe him? You could describe him in two words: counter-cultural. You could reduce that to one word: *different*.

If you are to experience the fullness of God's blessedness, there must be a plugging of our ears to the stepping away from worldliness. A blessed man—a righteous or happy man, a man enjoying God's blessing—is a *separated man*. A man who is not *neutral*, but one who has a bias against evil in all its forms. He is no broader than the truth, and he is only as narrow as the truth. He is in the world, but the world is not in heaven. As they would say down there in Alabama, "He has his boat in the water, but no water is in the boat." He is in the world, but not of it.

Marday Grothe tells the story of a centurion, not of the Roman variety, but an old lady who was 104, who was asked, "what is the best thing about being 104?" And she said, "no peer pressure." Now the man in Psalm 1 was not 104, and there are not any here that I know of who are. We meet with plenty of "peer pressure."

But the righteous man, the blessed man, is one who does not *go with the flow*. He refuses *worldly beliefs, worldly activity, and worldly associates*—and it will cost him. He/she may be looked at as the oddball, hardcore, conservative type, but that's okay because the righteous man finds *satisfaction* in pleasing the Lord.

The righteous man is one who is not only satisfied in the Lord and separated from the world, but he is also *saturated with the Word*.

- ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

The conjunction "**but**" shifts us from the *negative* to the *positive*. It is a sharp contrast. The psalmist is a master teacher who uses *negative denial* and *positive assertion* so that there is no room for misunderstanding, and no wiggle space to slip through the cracks.

Who is the blessed man? He is not...He does not...he does not...BUT this is *what he does*. And now he explains to us what leads to the righteous man to *refuse* and *renounce* all of the pressure and appeals of the worldly and ungodly.

Simply put, *it is delight in Jehovah's law. "His delight is in the Law of the LORD."*

Note the word "**is**" which is present tense. His delight is in the law, not *once was* (past) or *will be* (future), but *presently is*. When seeking to discern where you are, don't look to the past or to the future, but where you are right now. What do you delight in now?

The word "**delight**" (chephets) means to desire, to want to take pleasure in, to be eager of, "the law (Torah—instruction or teaching) of Yahweh." This is to be true of the righteous man's life all the time. Not just on Sundays, but his delight is *always* in the law of the Lord. C.S. Lewis, the great British scholar, was puzzled by this statement, 'delights in the law of the Lord...' and said, "*I can understand how a man delights in God's mercies, visitations, and attributes, but not the law...you do not delight in the law, you respect it and hope to obey it.*"

The delight in God's law is only possible because of the new birth.

- **Romans 8:7**—because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to *do so*,

Now the second line further clarifies what he means, “...And in His law he meditates day and night.” The righteous man has *pleasure* in the law and is *preoccupied* with His law, “**day and night**”—that is, regularly and consistently. This reveals to us the centrality and the primacy of the Word of God in the righteous man’s life. It is not his experiences or his mystical encounters, but the core element, the center factor, in his life is the objective, written revelation of the Word of God.

The new birth has brought a new desire and a new nature. And that new nature desires the “*sincere milk of the Word*” (1 Pet.2:1ff). The first key to delighting in God’s Word is experiencing the new birth. But once the desire and longing for the truth are implanted in the soul by the new birth, then if we are to experience the fullness of God’s blessing, it must be watered by the practice of *biblical meditation*.

Don’t let the word “**meditate**” scare you. It has nothing to do with *relaxation techniques* or *breathing exercises*. It is as old as the patriarch Isaac when we read of him going out at dusk to meditate in the fields (Gen.24:63). It was what the Lord directed Joshua to do with the Law, “*Meditate on it day and night...then you will be prosperous and successful*” (Josh.1:8). Jeremiah said, “*Your words were found and I ate them; and they became the delight and joy of my heart.*” (Jer.15:16). And when Mary first heard the message of the good news of Christ, she “*treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart*” (Luke 2:19).

The Navigators ministry used the illustration of a hand to teach us how to get a grip on God’s Word. First, getting a grip on the Word requires the four fingers of *hearing it, reading it, studying it, and memorizing it*. But the thumb that strengthens the grip is *meditation*.

What is biblical meditation? It is an easy habit to begin. It’s as portable as your brain, as available as your imagination, as near as your Bible, and the benefits are immediate.

J.I. Packer reminds us that “Meditation is a lost art today, and Christian people suffer grievously from their ignorance of its practice. Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communication with God.”⁴

But when Christ turns the light on and changes your life, by changing the *leadership* and *lordship* of your heart, then His Words become *your delight*. His truth seeps in like rainwater soaking in a garden. Then as you *note, quote, and devote* yourself to the Scriptures—as you *ponder, picture, and personalize* the truth—you find that God’s Word leads to *spiritual growth, emotional strength, deeper intimacy, and steady-steadying joy*. It lessens *anxiety, reduces stress, and generates peace*.

This is the righteous man. Like a cow chewing cud, he takes all of the juice from God’s Word and benefits from it daily. He is *satisfied in the Lord, separated from the world, saturated with the Word*. Finally, the righteous man is *supplied by the Lord*.

⁴ Robert J. Morgan, *Reclaiming the Lost Art of Biblical Meditation*

- ³ He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

You heard it said, "A picture is worth a thousand words," and the Psalmist uses metaphoric language to paint the picture. The figure of speech he uses shows us that the result of rejecting *worldly counsel, worldly activity and worldly associations*, and *delighting in* and being *preoccupied with the law of God*. You will be **"like a tree firmly planted by streams of water..."**

Now it's easy to take an analogy and run down the street, up the block, and around the corner with it, but the text fleshes out the analogy.

The blessed man has five traits:

- a. ("He will be like a tree firmly planted...") He has stability.
- b. ("by streams [plural] of water...") He has vitality.
- c. ("which yields its fruit in its season...") He has productivity.
- d. ("and its leaf does not wither...") He has durability.
- e. ("and in whatever he does, he prospers...") He has prosperity—that is the prosperity of the soul.

Now don't misread that last word "prosper" and conclude that this means that as a Christian there are *no setbacks, no struggles, or no stumbling blocks* in your life. This picture shows us that a righteous man, a blessed man, is *prolific*. There is no explanation other than God is giving them grace. They are *thriving*, not just *surviving*. While others are dying on the vine, the blessed man is bearing the fruit of Christlikeness, the fruit of ministry, and the fruit of faithfulness.

Application: Does this describe your life? Now, this contrast is placed before us so that we do things right now: *reflect* and *respond*. *Audit* and *examine*. Is there an increasing separation from the world? Is there an increasing delight in His law?

B. The Way of the Wicked (vv.4-6)

⁴The wicked are not so,

Literally, in the Hebrew, it is translated, **"Not so the wicked, not so."** Are they blessed? *Not so*. Are they happy? *Not so*. Are they fruitful? *Not so*. They may look successful, sound spiritual, and appear satisfied, but the Word of God says, **NOT SO!**

What are the wicked like? The simile that the Psalmist uses is "chaff." The picture is drawn from harvest time. The conclusion is *unsparing*.

But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

The figure is that of winnowing, in which the threshed corn/wheat is tossed up for the husks and fragments of straw to blow away, leaving behind only the grain. Chaff is the ultimate metaphor of what is rootless and weightless. The same term is used in Judges to describe the men Abimelech hired who were worthless and reckless.

In Psalm 37:35-36, David later points out that the wicked look like that they are *people of substance and thriving*, but the day of judgment will come and disclose, it was nothing but straw.

³⁵ I have seen a wicked, violent man
Spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil.
³⁶ Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more;
I sought for him, but he could not be found.

A sad and utter defeat of all the plans of the ungodly awaits them. All that they do will be suddenly removed. If only those of you who are not saved could see this! But you cannot because you are blind and all you hear is the world's music and the devil's lies.

Right now the tares and the wheat are being allowed to worship and grow together (*Matt.13:24ff*), but the day is coming when a separation will be made. This figure is often found in the Scripture. John the Baptist says that Christ "*will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*" (*Matt.3:12*). There is coming a day when unsaved husbands will be "*blown*" away and separated from their saved wives, and unsaved wives will be "*blown*" away from their saved husbands. There is coming a day when unsaved children and teenagers will be "*blown*" away from their godly mother and father. The day is coming!

What does the Psalmist mean that they will be driven away like chaff? He explains in verse 5,

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,

It does not mean they will not "appear" in the judgment; they *will* stand before God. It means *they will not stand with the approval or acceptance of God*. To "stand" is to maintain one's cause, to hold one's own, to be unhurt and unterrified. But in the last day, the wicked will have *no confidence, no comfort, no support*.

- Why would you appear before the all-knowing, perfectly holy, triune God in your own tethered and human righteousness? Don't you know your deeds of righteousness are as filthy rags in His sight? (*Is.64:6*)
- Why would you dare take the chance of being summoned before the Almighty God without a representative, an advocate, or someone who can stand in your place?
- Why would you risk the terrifying prospect of having your sins accounted for in the eyes of the God who has promised that He will not leave the guilty unpunished? Do you not know that One has been sent from heaven above to die in your place?

The unsaved, unconverted man or woman, boy or girl will not stand with approval in the sight of God, and just to be clear, the Psalms adds,

Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

The "wicked" mentioned in verse 1 is repeated in 5, and the "sinner" mentioned in verse 1 is repeated in verse 5, and now the Psalmist says, *the day of congregating together will soon be over, and eternal separation will be made between God's friends and God's foes*.

What is the great difference between the saint and the sinner, the righteous and the wicked, the saved and the unsaved? The difference is not *what you see* or *what your friends or family members say*; the difference is in what GOD KNOWS.

- **2 Timothy 2:19**—Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.”

God has a perfect understanding of the real character of His people. He knows their thoughts and intentions, their secret wills and aims, the hidden works of darkness in every man’s conscience. And here, the word “**know**” means that He approves, loves, and deals mercifully with.

- **1 Corinthians 4:5**—Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men’s* hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.

⁶ For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

This is their end. Not extinction. Not annihilation. Condemnation. No one will ever remember what the wicked did a million years from now, but...

*When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to see God’s praise than when we’d first begun.*⁵

Conclusion:

Years ago, the great bible teacher, H.A. Ironside, told of a visit to Palestine by a man named Joseph Flacks. He had the opportunity to address a gathering of Jews and Arabs and took for his subject Psalm 1. After reading Psalm 1, he asked the question, “Who is the blessed man of whom the psalmist speaks? This man never walked in the counsel of the wicked or stood in the way of sinners or sat in the seat of mockers. He was an absolutely sinless man.”

Nobody spoke. So, Flacks said: “Was it our great father Abraham?” And one old man said, “No, it cannot be Abraham. He denied his wife and told a lie about her.”

“Well, how about the lawgiver Moses?”

“No,” someone said. “It cannot be Moses. He killed a man and lost his temper by the waters of Meribah.”

Flacks suggested David. It was not David.

There was silence for a long while. Then an elderly Jew arose and said, “My brothers, I have a little book here; it’s called the New Testament. I have been reading it; and if I could believe this book, if I could be sure that it is true, I would say that the man of the first Psalm was Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶

Jesus is that man. He is the only perfect man who ever lived, and He is the sinner’s Savior. Jesus stands at the portal of this book and shows us the way to live and helps us to do it.

DMLJ—“Happiness depends on two things only: 1) our relationship to God and His righteousness, and upon 2) what I am and not what is happening to me.”

⁵ John Newton, *Amazing Grace*

⁶ Boice, p.19

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