

Psalm 1

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Date: 14 August 2022

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[0 : 00] Life is offering you infinite paths. This is a saying that I've heard recently, and it's certainly in the water or in the air around us today, that the ways of life, the paths of life are infinite, that they're unlimited, that each of us has a unique pathway in our journey in life.

Now, that's of course true. Everyone in this room will have their own unique journey. The people you meet, the places you go, the decisions that you face, the opportunities you have, those with whom you live your life, these are all your own.

And they're different from everyone else's, at least in the details. But the first psalm is going to show us that actually, despite all those unique and kind of infinite elements in the journey of life, there are really only two ways in life.

There are two paths. One with God, and one without God. We can really take all of our individual unique paths and put them into two piles.

One that lives life with God or in relationship with Him, and one that lives life without God. And I want you to leave this morning in that first pile.

[1 : 29] I want you to see that the life with God is the good path. That it's the true path. That it's the right path, and the path that you want to be on.

But it's not just me that wants you living a life with God. Of course, the first psalm, most of all, wants you there. We are in Psalm 1.

You can turn there, though I know some of us have been memorizing, so you might do that to your own embarrassment. Turn to the psalm. It presents two people. Two people. And these two people are on the different paths that I'm talking about.

Again, one with God and one without God. The psalm calls them the blessed way and the wicked way. So we have blessed is the one who, and then wicked are as such and such and so on.

That's what we're going to explore this morning. And the psalm is going to show us, it's going to show us just as much as it's going to tell us about these two ways of life. So we'll see the blessed way, and we will see the wicked way.

[2 : 40] Have you seen a packet of cigarettes lately? It's not a probing question. It's a black package with white letters now. So they've gotten rid of all the kind of advertisement and branding.

And it says, smoking damages your lungs. The pack I saw also has a picture of a man holding his arm up with the caption of, Open wound after lung surgery.

It's not a pleasant picture. But it shows us, and it tells us, how bad smoking can be. Similar thing happens with motivational posters.

Do you remember these? A ball of eagle flying over the Rocky Mountains. At the bottom of the cap says, excellence. Winners are not those who never fail, but those who never quit.

Excellence. Someone is an inspirational poster. In that way it is. It's more profound than excellence.

[3 : 47] It's showing you something worth living for. And a person to live with. And like a package of cigarettes, it's also a warning sign. Even more serious, of course, than lung disease.

It's a warning sign. Aspiration and warning. This is what the song holds up for us. And what we need to do this morning is have a good look at these two ways of life.

And I trust that you'll be drawn in the right direction. So let's begin with verse 1. The blessed way.

Blessed is the man. The opening one does not say blessed are those. It doesn't say blessed are the people who. It says blessed is the one man.

And we'll immediately see two things. That this path is the blessed one. It is the blessed path. And yet it's not a popular path. Blessed is the man who walks not in counsel of the wicked.

[4 : 51] Nor stands in the way of sinners. Nor sits in the seat of scoffers. This is the way of the one and the way of the many. Wicked sinners, scoffers.

These are groups of bad people. And they're juxtaposed to the singular blessed person. The wicked give counsel. The sinners have a particular way of life.

And the scoffers sit in judgment. And they concoct evil schemes. The blessed man rejects all of these possibilities. He shuts his ears to their advice.

He gets off the wayward path. And he rejects the evil folly of the scoffers. He does not want to walk in their counsel. Does not want to stand in their path.

Does not want to sit in their seat. This is truly the blessed way. But it doesn't mean it's easy. Going against the crowd.

[5 : 49] Well, it's probably most difficult as a teenager. Turn 13 years old. And all of a sudden, people matter in a whole new way. Eventually that kind of ends.

I think there's something unique about teenage years. And the social world. And the significance of that. So you go to a birthday party. And everyone brought their swimsuit.

It's a pool there. You didn't bring your swimsuit though. Because you don't like to swim. For whatever reason, you're just not comfortable with it. So what happens when everyone gets in the pool?

It's time to get in the pool. Come on. Get in. That's what they say. And you say, I don't have my swimsuit. I didn't bring my swimsuit. Now, of course someone says, I've got an extra one.

Which is what you don't want to hear. But going against the crowd isn't easy. It's not easy. The psalm speaks of the wicked, sinners, and scoffers.

[6 : 48] And I don't want to give the impression that most people at a pool party fit into that category. So what temptation might the blessed person actually encounter? What might life in these sorts of people bring this person's way?

Well, the first chapter of Proverbs. The first chapter of Proverbs. Constructs a little short scenario of temptation. It's a father giving advice to his son. And he kind of says, son, imagine that these sinners are coming to tempt you.

And they want you to join in in their plan to steal that. So this is the father talking. Basically saying what the sinners would say.

Come with us. Let us lie in wait for blood. Let us ambush the innocent without reason. Like Sheol, let us swallow them alive and whole like those who go down to the pit.

We shall find all precious goods. We shall fill our houses with wonder. Throw in your lot among us. We will have one purse. You can hear them rooting the boy on.

[7 : 55] Come on. Don't you want to be tough? Don't you want to share in the spoils? This is your chance. This is your chance to get it big. The Proverbs gives a clear sense of what these wicked characters are like.

Again, I'm talking about the wicked. Sinners and scoffers from verse 1. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know over what they stumble.

The wicked accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice. These problems show that the wicked are ignorant. They are oblivious to error. That their way is painful.

They are dishonest, greedy, untrustworthy. Another prophet says, A wise son hears his father's instruction, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

Scoffer is the name of the arrogant, haughty man Who acts with arrogant pride. Self-centered, unteachable pride.

[9 : 00] That's the scoffer. These people don't accept correction. They're violent. They're greedy. They're insulting. It seems like they do whatever they and their companions want to do.

The general principle is summed up in Proverbs 13.20. Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise. But the companion of fools will suffer harm.

On the BBC you can see a program currently about a burglary in Kensington from 2019. Three thieves broke into Tamara Eccleston's house.

I didn't know who she was. She's the daughter of Bernie Eccleston, the former head of Formula One. It's the largest home burglary in English history. 26 million pounds of jewelry.

That's what they took. So the police tracked these guys down and a few of their accomplices. One of whom, one of the accomplices was named Alexander Stan.

[10 : 07] Apparently the burglars came to his house at the end of one of their burglaries. But not even the one under consideration. So he had had involvement with these thieves in the past.

Now, it goes to show that in the end, these burglars were charged and sentenced to prison. Stan, though, was found innocent.

The jury was convinced he didn't know anything about this crime. And he was let off. And as soon as he tells that to the reporter, this is what he says next.

After the case, though I was clear of any wrongdoing, I lost everything. My family. My place of living. I was homeless for a month and a half.

In a matter of seconds, my life was thrown upside down. I think we sometimes want to rewrite the proverb, whoever walks with the wise will become wise.

[11:07] That's fine. And the companion of fools will get rich. Become popular. Look cool. Earn respect. But no, in reality, the companion of fools will suffer harm.

The companion of fools will suffer harm. The way of blessedness says no to wicked counsel. It avoids the path of evil. For the wide world, you know people who steer around potholes to an excessive degree.

Two, three car lengths, that sort of thing. Right? That's what it does. You get away from evil. It does not even pause to look at the scholars. It does not even succeed. These are sources along one's path that can lead and will lead to death.

They do not need spiritual life. They do not bless their recipients. The blessed person gets his advice elsewhere. And this is what we see in verse 2. His delight is on the law of the Lord.

And on his law, he meditates day and night. The source of all blessedness is God's instruction. One commentator says, the way to happiness means following not the advice, the question of the phrases.

[12:23] There's some important phrases here. So, the first one, his delight is on. Right? This isn't just to delight or take delight. This is a particular phrase.

His delight is on, particularly on or in the law of the Lord. This same phrase can refer to many things. The Lord can delight in his people.

A psalmist can delight in God's people. Someone can delight in a lover. Jonathan delights in his friend David. People delight in gold.

The Lord delights in holy virtues and does not delight in the death of anyone. Lastly, some people do not delight in the Lord's word.

This is from Jeremiah 6. To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold, their ears are uncircumcised. They cannot listen. Behold, the word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn.

[13:23] They do not delight in it. All of these passages show that to delight really means to receive delight from someone or something.

To receive delight from someone or something. The object of delight is a cause for joy and pleasure. I get delight out of gold. I delight from my friend David.

I get delight from God's people. That is the idea. These things are sources of delight. So the image is not so much looking into the Bible, but of being filled up with it.

Being filled up with God's instruction. And the delight that comes from that. His delight is on the law of the Lord. The second thing, to meditate.

To meditate on his law day and night. This means to turn over in one's thoughts. To ponder. Using the memory. To meditate on the breath of material.

[14:25] It requires focus and it expects an outcome. God. Just listen to Psalm 143. I remember the days of old.

I meditate on all that you have done. I ponder the work of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you. Himself. And it's never wrong to have that attitude.

Lord, I need you. I'm desperate for God. God is always pleased to earn you back. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. So the source of blessing is the law of God. And as we'll see in the next verse, delighting in the law of the Lord and meditating on his law is more like drinking water, being nourished, than it is kind of digging in the ground and looking for something in the scriptures.

The idea of receiving God's word is a little more than searching through God's word. But of course we do both of those things.

[15 : 31] The Lord's law is the source of blessedness. It's not found in the mouths of the wicked, those who reject God, but found in God himself. The psalm has told us this, but now it wants to show us.

What does this blessedness actually look like? If God's law is the source, then what is the substance? What is the substance of being blessed? Let's have a look at verse 3. He is like a tree. The blessed person is like a tree, planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season. And its leaf does not wither. And all that he does, he prospers.

The Bible can sometimes make comparisons that are humorous or a bit odd to the modern mind. The Bible, Proverbs, likens the epitome of diligence to an ant. Look at the ant and be wise. And here we have a tree.

But don't underestimate the tree. Let's again look at a few phrases. He is like a tree. That tree is first of all planted by streams of water, which now we know to be the instruction of God.

[16 : 36] That's what the water is. What is water to a tree? Well, it's life itself. Without water, a tree will die. And with water, it not only lives, but bears fruit and grows.

Particularly reminded of this moment. It's the same with the law of God. Without it, we perish. We wither away as human beings. But with it, we live.

We bear fruit. And we grow. It's like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season.

This is a curious phrase. Now, this may mean that the blessed life does not always bear all of its fruit all the time. I think that's probably the case.

There are times and seasons in the Christian life, basically. Right? And we see little hints of this elsewhere in the scriptures. Paul tells Timothy to preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. That is, when the situation is convenient and when it's inconvenient.

[17 : 38] That's partly applicable to what's going on. Maybe Psalm 119 is closer. My soul longs for your salvation. I hope in your word.

My eyes long for your promise. I ask, when will you come for me? For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke. And yet, I have not forgotten your statutes.

The psalmist's mind is stayed. And his heart is stayed on the Lord's law. And yet, he cries for comfort. And yet, he feels like he does not have the promises of God.

There may indeed be fluctuations in the Christian life. I think this is certainly true from experience. And I think it's a testament in the Bible. What is clear is that this tree produces fruit when it should. It produces fruit when it does it should. The water works. Lastly, in all that he does, he prospers. Sleep does not wither in.

[18 : 39] In all that he does, he prospers. This whole psalm has sounded pretty individualistic so far. The one man against the many wicked men. He's a tree, meditating on God's law.

A mighty example of private devotion. Who then succeeds in everything he does. But we shouldn't read the image that way. This is one of the most wonderful things about psalm, I think.

It describes an individual, yes, but it's not individualistic. We know this because of the weather.

What was and is the weather of life in Israel?

It's airy. It's sunny. It's hot. And what would a tree offer? Well, it would offer shade. It would offer fruit.

It would offer protection. It would offer relief. You'll recall at the end of Jonah, Jonah 4. Jonah is having his attitude.

[19 : 41] And he goes off away from the city. And he sits down. And the Lord provides a tree there. And the tree grows up quickly. And it provides shade. And its comfort provides rest for him.

And the same way the Lord takes that tree away. And Jonah returns to his misery. Let me read a slightly longer passage here from Hosea 14.

The end of Hosea. I will heal the apostasy of my people. I will love them freely. For my anger is turned from them.

This is the Lord through the prophet. I will be like the dew to Israel. He shall blossom like a lily. He shall take root like the trees of Lebanon.

His shoots shall spread out. His beauty shall be like the olive. And his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow.

[20 : 38] They shall flourish like the grain. They shall blossom like the vine. Their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim.

What have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. And here's the end. I am like an evergreen cypress. For me comes your fruit.

The blessed way is not only blessed for the person meditating on God's law and avoiding bad advice. It's blessed for the entire community.

When you receive the Lord's kindness, you benefit and I benefit. Your obedience is good for me.

And my obedience is good for you. The implication is that the opposite is also true.

My sin is bad for you. And yours for me. As the church of Christ, we are all in this together. Let's take a moment to see what the New Testament has to say about this with respect to the church of Christ.

[21 : 44] The source of Christian growth. Well, that's teachings about Christ. In Colossians, Paul says, Christ we proclaim. Him we proclaim. Warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom.

That we may present everyone mature in Christ. Jesus commissions his own followers with all authority. Go, baptize in my name and teach others to do what I have commanded.

The teaching of Christ is for our delight and for our growth in Christ's light. That's the source. And what's the substance?

What does it mean to be a tree in the New Testament? Well, a very well-known passage shows us the way. All scripture is breathed out by God. And profitable in the teaching for proof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. To be complete, whole. And equipped for every good work. The word of God nourishes godly character in us.

[22 : 49] And it has benefits. These good works fill the church with all sorts of good. Compassion. Kindness. Humility. Meekness. Patience. Bearing with one another. Forgiving each other. And binding it all up with love and peace.

These are the fruits of Christian discipleship. And they're gotten from receiving the teaching of God. Meditating on the law of God. This is the way of blessedness.

This is the way of life with God. The blessed life is life lived with Christ. The way of blessedness is not necessarily an easy way.

It's probably unpopular. And you'll probably have pressures and temptations to change. Of course. But the Lord has provided this as the much better way of life.

It is the better way of life. He's instructed us along that path. He's made it delightful, secure, long-lasting. Productive. And beneficial to others. It is an attractive way of life.

[23 : 55] And it is the true way of life. And the one for which we are designed. All my good is found in you, O Lord. This blessed way, though.

As good as it is, it's not the only way. It's not the only way to live. There is an alternative. Have a look briefly at the psalm. Have a look at verse 3.

And then have a look at verse 4. You'll notice the difference here. In English, verse 3 is 30 words. It's followed by 14 words in verse 4.

In Hebrew, it's 17 words, followed by 9. The psalmist spends twice as much space on the image of blessedness as it does on the image of wickedness.

The wicked get half the airtime. The blessed man is like a tree planted, absorbing water, yielding fruit, not withering, but prospering. The wicked are like chaff that the wind drives away.

[24 : 57] The psalmist makes the point through the poetry itself. Patience, any prolonged growth versus chaff that leaves with the breeze.

What's chaff? You'll probably be familiar with this. It's the husk or the outer bits of grain when you harvest grain. So you cut the grain down.

There were many ways that you could get that nice sort of kernel of grain left. So you could take a pile of grain and you could sort of smear it with a stint.

That would be done with threshing floors. So you've heard of the threshing floor. You could take this big sort of stone thing and drag it over. That's the threshing sledge. So you kind of roll the grain over in that way.

And now, of course, we have mills. Well, I don't know how much we use those now, but more recently, you have mills. The two new stones, and one rolls on the top of the other, the grain falls down by a side.

[25 : 59] All these methods will give you the grain. The stuff that's left over, the powdery little kind of flaky bits, that's the chaff. Now, once you use those methods, and almost all of the chaff is gone, there still might be a little bit left over.

So you'd walk outside. You'd find a little gentle breeze. You'd put the grain in a large basket, and you would throw it up. Give it a few good throws. And that breeze would not blow the grain away. But it would blow the chaff away, just like that. The grain would come right back down into the basket. So it is with the wicked.

He's gone. The key here is not that these are worthless human beings, that the kind of, the value of someone's life amounts to chaff. The point is that they're not rooted in God's word.

They don't have spiritual roots. A tree sways in the breeze. It enjoys the breeze, really. It doesn't even lose a leaf. Chaff in a meager breeze is absolutely helpless.

[27 : 06] It is not rooted. It is not bearing the fruits of it, enjoying the security that comes with life with God. The substance of wickedness is ultimately not much.

And the fate of the wicked is similar. Verse 5. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. In the same way that we have a contrast of images, trees and chaff.

We have a contrast of communities. Remember verse 1. The blessed man does not stand among the sinners. Here the wicked will not stand.

That is, be left standing amidst God's judgment. Nor will they stand among the righteous. Psalm 24 talks about the kind of conditions for getting into the temple.

For being a part of the worshipping community. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? That is, go up to Jerusalem to get to the temple. And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

[28 : 11] Who does not lift up his soul toward his faults. And does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord. And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

The wicked person misses the defining feature of the worshipping community. That they draw their life from the Holy Scriptures.

This is what they do not do. They do not draw their life from the Holy Scriptures. And live life under God's leadership. The wicked do not take direction from God.

And therefore do not gain entrance into the sanctuary. Does this mean that only Christians can come to church today? Well of course not.

No, not at all. The New Testament indicates full welcome in this regard. Church doors are open to all. But it does make clear. That in the final judgment.

[29 : 05] When Christ returns and we stand before him. That only those who know him. Will be admitted into the eternal sanctuary. Christ's words never cease to make me a little bit nervous.

Depart from me. For I never be. This access to stand with Christ is not about studying the Bible enough.

Or cleaning up your behavior. Not first and foremost at least. God wants good holy people, yes. But he wants ourselves first. He wants us first and foremost.

And so does all end on a relational note. The last verse. Verse 6. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous. But the way of the wicked will perish.

It's been rightly said that to know here means to take care of a person. To attend a person with affection and concern. To be closer to a person. To provide for someone.

[30 : 08] That's how God knows the righteous. And how he will know them. The way of the wicked will perish.

It's headed towards the bad end. As we saw before. Life with God is now life with Christ. The Father made the Son our wisdom.

Our righteousness. Sanctification. Redemption. He is the way of righteousness. The way of blessedness is still the same. The source is God. God's word.

Among his holy community. In relationship with him. But that relationship now comes through knowing Jesus. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing.

But to us who are being saved. It is the power of God. To have a full relationship with God.

[31 : 07] To be blessed. And to bless others. This is the substance of our connection and relationship with Christ. The biblical message is consistent.

There are two ways of life. These ways lead to different destinations. Living with God in this life means living with God in the next life. Living without God in this life means living without him in the next.

The Bible doesn't actually say that much about heaven and hell. It doesn't give us a crystal clear sense of what it's going to be like. About in detail at least. However biblical it is.

I like C.S. Lewis' description. Hell. He portrays as a massive city where people move further and further away from each other.

Consumed with themselves. Never disliking their neighbors. It's locked from the inside, he says. Defined as a place where people have chosen to live without God.

[32 : 04] That is one path. The other path leads to life. To satisfaction. To whole and healthy relationships.

To peace. And to pardon. Psalm 1 is the gateway to the Psalms. And it's the gateway to life with God.

So the Psalms stand before us as the law upon which we can meditate. As a gift from God for our good. As water for a fruitful and prosperous life.

It's a guide to worship. And really it is a part of worship itself. So come to the Psalms. Ready to meet the Lord.

Let's pray.