

The Blessed Man

Psalm 1

The book of Psalms is the prayer book of the Bible. Seventy-three psalms are attributed to David, 12 to Asaph the musician, 12 to the sons of Korah, two to Solomon, and one each to Heman, Ethan, and Moses. In the psalms we find not just unparalleled heights of joy, but lament, grief, pain, and enduring affliction (Ps. 88). Psalms is also *the* psalter—the songbook of the Bible, every word meant to be sung. The psalms are performative: when we sing them, we are changed and therefore so is the world (Col. 3:16; Ps. 19:7-9). Through these songs we are blessed, protected, convicted, corrected, instructed, undone, relieved, reconciled, restored, and remade in the image of Christ—the Christ who Himself sang these songs. Thomas Watson called Psalm 1 the psalm of psalms. It introduces the whole book and contains within it the entire scope of the Christian life.

Blessed to Not

Like the Sermon on the Mount, the first word of Psalms is “blessed”. It’s a plural word, and it’s not totally clear if it’s an adjective or substantive: “Blessed is the man” or “O the blessednesses of the man”. God is the eternal, abundant, overflowing, never-ending giver of every good and perfect gift. This blessedness of unshakeable joy is offered to you and to everyone who does *not*. One commentator said the psalmist has no sense of marketing. He leads with the negative truth that the blessed one does not:

- Walk in the way of the wicked
- Stand in the path of sinners
- Sit in the seat of the scornful

There’s nothing wrong with sweet and kind blessings, and God gives those in spades. But He gives them to the one who doesn’t fellowship with the wicked. In the first verse of the greatest songbook ever written is a progression of those who leave Christ. They walk, stand, and then sit (v1). They lend an ear to ungodly counsel, then tag along with sinful behavior (“I was only in the car”), and finally take their seat among those who scoff at God and His ways. A sexual example would be a man first entertains lustful thoughts, then watches shows with a bunch of skin (“So realistic, you legalist”), and then ends up in an ungodly relationship. Worldly Christians like to think they can stay at the “walk” stage without progressing, but the wise know better. Your affections are changing in one direction or another.

Deep Delight

We must be against sin, but this alone is not enough. Every sin is only a twisted good, necessarily parasitic, borrowing and perverting a good thing from God. Understanding the antithesis allows you to reject the counterfeit in order to pursue the lasting good, true, and beautiful. Why is it alluring to walk in the way of the wicked? Because from a shallow perspective it looks cool, brave, informed, and strong. In reality it’s craven, insecure, ignorant and weak, but this takes maturity to understand. Standing in the path of sinners includes camaraderie and action. Sitting in the seat of scorners is a place of power and influence. The blessed man delights in the Torah of Yahweh and meditates on it day and night (v2). He can’t get enough of it. His affection drives him to read, think, ponder and pursue it, the only way to approach God’s word. Think of something you love to do. How hard is it to get you to do that thing? Do you need a checklist to get it done? No, it’s the thing you do without thinking, by natural inclination. The Torah can refer to the

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Pentateuch, first five books of the Bible or to the Old Testament. The Old Testament is mostly historical narrative. The blessed read it, think about it, learn from it, apply it, and love to read it again. Notice how the heart and mind are totally integrated in the Christian life. Desire drives both those who know God and those who don't, but in Christ there's no divorce between heart and mind. Whereas the atheist can't be too careful with what he reads, the Christian is called to love with all of his mind. We don't have all the answers, but the answers are there for us to find. The blessed man thinking about the law day and night is not rehearsing memory verses. He is understanding and applying the characters and stories and principles to life. How is it that Laban is so greedy and yet ends up empty-handed? What does it mean to boil a kid in its mother's milk? How can I be like Joseph and grow in influence and authority? How did Sarah trust Abraham while he took her into the middle of nowhere? Why did Lot end up in Sodom, and why does the author of Hebrews call him righteous? The Bible is the word of life and the Psalms in particular teach us to delight in every corner of our existence (e.g. Ps. 104:10-18).

The Planted & the Scattered

The result of delighting in God's law is to be like a tree, planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in season with leaves that never wither. Whatever he does prospers (v3). The image here might refer to a tree being nourished by a consistently flowing river or to a cultivated tree that had rivulets running in channels to keep it watered. The wind and weather can't uproot him nor make him unfruitful because he isn't controlled by the environment. The blessed man is by definition antifragile. It's one thing to look strong—rich, prosperous, happy—but the question is whether you can thrive during a storm. This requires roots. Jesus sets out a similar example in the man who built his house upon the rock versus the man who built upon the sand (Matt. 7:24-27). It's what is beneath the surface that makes the difference. The ungodly are not rooted but are like chaff which blows away (v4). The psalmist knows about the final judgment and that the ungodly will not stand in it (v5). God knows the way of the righteous, and the way of the ungodly will perish (v6). Understood rightly, this is a great encouragement. Do you want to be upheld and growing in Christ? Be at home with His people. Read and sing the psalms. Reject the counsels and ways of the wicked. Delve into and delight in the Scriptures. Be fruitful and blessed in every season knowing God is sovereign over all things, establishing the work of your hands and ready to judge the living and the dead.