

November 22, 2015
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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THE BLESSED PERSON Psalm 1

We are probably familiar with the story of Jacob's dysfunctional family. He married sisters. One he loved and one he tolerated. The tolerated wife, Leah, produced children for a time. The loved wife, Rachel, could not produce children so she talked her husband into fathering children through her servant girl, Bilhah. Not to be outdone, Leah demanded that Jacob father children through her servant girl, Zilpah. Zilpah birthed a son who Leah named Asher. He is one of the twelve fathers of the nation of Israel, one tribe being named for him.

Why did Leah name her son Asher? She answered that question for us when she said, "*Happy am I! For women have called me happy.*" So she called his name Asher" (Genesis 30:13). The name Asher is the Hebrew word *aw-share*.' So is the English translation "happy." Leah was so happy to have arranged this deal where her husband had relations with another woman in order to get back at her sister of whom she was jealous. That is kind of an odd setting for *happy*, isn't it?

Maybe ancient Hebrew happiness wasn't like modern American happiness. In our culture, happiness comes from purchasing a new home that nearly bankrupts us, or marrying the star athlete even though he is a womanizer, or going on a vacation where you get sick and have your identity stolen. In a very few weeks, all over America little children and even some of their parents will rip open presents and shout with glee, "Oh this is just what I always wanted. I am so happy!" And then the gift is found six months later in the neighborhood yard sale. Are we sure we know what "happy" means?

In this first Psalm, the writer contrasts two ways of living. The one way is the normal, typical way of life that is illustrated by normal, everyday sinners – or worse. That is a way that kind of life ends in destruction. In contrast is the way of the happy person. Yes, the word *blessed* that opens this psalm is that same Hebrew word *aw-share*.'

In this wisdom writing, God tells us, His created beings, what His plan is for us to find happiness. By contrast, He revealed that living life like the majority of people live life will never bring happiness.

Like the wisdom literature of Proverbs, this psalm points out the importance of who you hang out with. The world makes the point very clear that if you want to be happy, you need to hang out with the cool people. In their estimate, unpopular people could not possibly be happy. Quite to the contrary, the eternally authoritative Word of God declares that you will only find true happiness when you hang out with God through fellowship with Him in His Bible.

The Blessed Person Prospers (vv.1-3).

What is the blessed person like? How can we tell if we are one of them? This person does not take counsel of sin (v.1). *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers (v.1).*

Notice that the psalmist identified the characteristics of sinful people in various ways. He calls them the wicked. A wicked person is one who is at odds with God. To that end, the Hebrew word is often translated *ungodly* in English. This person is at odds with God because he is abnormal, guilty of a crime, and deserving of punishment. To describe him as abnormal is not to be unkind as though speaking of someone who has a disability. God created humans in His likeness to enjoy fellowship with Him. That is God's norm for people. Obviously because of sin, everyone is born outside that parameter of "normal." Therefore, all people who sin against God are abnormal according to God's plan and desire for us.

How odd that what God considers to be abnormal is what people in Satan's world consider to be normal. Be that as it may, the fact remains that being abnormal and breaching God's design, this

person is guilty of crime against God. Being guilty of crime against God, the person is deserving of punishment. Therefore, all sinners qualify as wicked, but some sinners are more wicked than others.

So what are sinners like? The root to this word is the most basic idea of sin in the Old Testament. The word means most simply to miss the mark. Everyone is born thoroughly infused with this principle because Adam missed God's mark of righteousness. Therefore, we all by nature live with attitudes, thoughts, and actions that miss God's mark of acceptability. But some people are drawn out of this nature by God's grace and redeemed through the righteous work of Jesus Christ. Most are not and, therefore, sin appears to be the normal, acceptable mode of operation in life. The person who avoids sin is considered to be the abnormal one.

The psalmist also used the term scoffers to describe people who are at odds with God. This is a proud and haughty person, the kind who has all the answers or knows where to find them and he scorns you for being backward. Solomon concluded, "*Scoffer*" is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride (Proverbs 21:24). Solomon described the person as incorrigible, resistant to reproof, and one who hates rebuke. *A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke (Proverbs 13:1)*. Therefore, these people mock sin and God's standard of judgment. True wisdom and the knowledge of righteousness elude them. *A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding (Proverbs 14:6)*.

Sadly, these are the popular people in a culture sunk in sin. A sign that a culture or nation is under God's judgment is that the people will clamor for scoffers to be their leaders and presidents.

How does the blessed or happy person deal with folks like this? Again the writer expressed interaction with sinful people in various ways. Happy people do not walk in the counsel of people like that. Walking in the counsel is just plain thinking. The person who is really happy refuses to think like the wicked, scoffing sinners. That way of thinking is not only popularized in television and the social media but is demanded in secular schools and universities and expected by political correctness. But for a person to choose to think in this line will eventually result in the person being very unhappy.

Second, the happy person does not stand in the way of these sinners. Standing in the way is the same as behaving. This is to take a stand along with (possibly to the point of becoming a servant) a particular custom, manner, or lifestyle.

Third, the happy person does not sit in the seat of the scoffers. Walking in the counsel is how we think, standing in the way is how we behave, and sitting in the seat is a matter of belonging. Sitting does convey the idea of coming to rest, being settled, or dwelling in a place. Here the person is pictured coming to be a part of a particular surrounding, the seat.

The person who avoids these kinds of interactions, these kinds of sinful people is blessed. Notice the declension that the writer pictures here as the thought moves from thinking like, to acting like, to hanging out with. Happy people choose not to think like, act like, and hang out with these people.

There are legends found in children books about people like Tarzan and Mowgli who are raised by animals. Not surprisingly, they are able to communicate with animals, understand animals, and often act like the animals that raised them. But interacting with humans is a bit of a challenge for such anomalies. So, too, people who think like, act like, and hang out with worldly people get along just fine with them – even though that is not what their Maker intended them to be!

Because happiness is a result, what do happy people think like, how do they act, who do they hang out with? The blessed person delights in the Bible. The blessed person avoids wicked scoffers, *but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night (v.2)*.

Remember that happiness is a result. The person who ends up being blessed delights in God's law. The word law tends to scare modern Christians. But another way of stating this truth is that the object of delight is the revelation of God's character. On the one hand, the ceremonial law of Moses proved that God is holy beyond human comprehending, and His righteousness is impossible to achieve and maintain. That is scary. But in the moral law of God, He provided the means for His righteousness to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Like David, we delight in the moral law of God that reveals to us His many wonderful attributes. He concluded, *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple (Psalm 19:7)*. He prayed, *Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law (Psalm 119:18)*. That is what delighting in God's law looks like. In God's moral law, we learn about God's non-communicable attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, infinity, self-existence, sovereignty, immutability. It is there we also learn about God's communicable attributes, His goodness, mercy, love, justice, knowledge, wisdom. The law tells us about God's work in life and eternity.

No wonder the happy person is delighting in the truths of the Bible. He finds pleasure in these truths. If we find pleasure in the truth of the Bible, we will read it regularly. In fact, if reading the Bible is a bother, maybe it is because we would rather think like, act like, and hang out with the sinning scoffers even if just on television or the internet.

The blessed person not only delights in reading the Bible, but he also meditates on God's law. After reading the Bible, the happy person thinks about what he read. This is a matter of taking a promise, a text, a thought from the Bible and running it over and over in your mind. This is how we learn to apply the truths of the Bible to everyday life.

Along with becoming happy, this person is also very prosperous (v.3). He is like a fruitful tree. *He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither (v.3a)*. The happy man who hangs out with God in the Bible is like a planted tree. Not a wild tree that just kind of shows up and has no purpose. A planted tree presupposes a planter. God plants us in order to produce fruit for His own glory. Jesus explained the practice to the disciples like this: *“Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up (Matthew 15:13)*. Here Jesus implied that God the Father plants trees for His purpose and will root out the ones He did not plant.

God plants happy trees beside streams of water. Not just a stream, but streams. Streams provide the nourishment and resources the tree needs to produce fruit. These are the streams of God's Word,

His grace, His working in us, His provision of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and His provision of fellow Christians who encourage us. Trees with that kind of resource will produce fruit of the Spirit, fruit that honors the One who planted it. Even its leaf does not wither. The leaf is not fruit but is still an outward sign of life.

God promises that this person prospers in all endeavors. *In all that he does, he prospers (v.3b)*. Of course this person is prospering in his walk with the Lord. His growth in righteousness is prospering. That is a wonderful promise, but let's deal with reality. What about happy people like David and Paul? In many Psalms David cried out to God for help because his enemy was about to destroy him. Wasn't it Paul who said he experienced bad times as well as good times (Phil. 4:12)? Didn't Paul end up being executed like many of the Old Testament prophets were and like his fellow apostles were? How can we call that prospering?

Prosperity in God's plan is the happy person becoming more like Him. Therefore, trials and tests that drive us to depend more on God are very profitable. And death, the removing from this body to the presence of God, is the greatest prosperity possible.

There is an Obvious Contrast (vv.4-6).

The wicked people are not like blessed people. *The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away (v.4)*. Consider what people like this do in light of what we have already seen in this psalm. They follow the advice and examples of fellow sinners. Because there has not been a change in their being, their hearts are still controlled by the sin nature. That is the normal, expected, default condition of all people. Only the grace of God through the miracle of regeneration can bring about change.

Therefore, the surprising thing is when an unregenerated person does not march in lockstep with the rest of the world. As more and more people, yea, the majority of a culture, or the world, repeat the same mantras over and over, that becomes the normal standard. A majority of fools taking the advice of other fools does not somehow change foolishness to wisdom.

The wicked people take on the same characteristics as fellow sinners. As a result, the normal condition of people in the world is to

a greater or lesser extent characterized by those traits we found in verse one. Those people (the majority of the world's population throughout history) are characterized as being at odds with God (wickedness), missing God's mark of righteousness (sin), and arrogantly concluding that if there is a God, He doesn't matter (scoffing).

This is often the meaning of the term "world" as it is used in the New Testament. Jesus warns His followers that the system or philosophy that is opposed to God and after the character of Satan will not like us. He said, *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (John 15:18-19).*

That is why God warned us through John that we should not desire to be like those people. John wrote, *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world (1 John 2:15-16).*

In fact, God's desire for us is to keep becoming less like that standard. Paul challenges Christians, *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).*

People like that are not likely to do things the happy people do. They are seldom found reading and meditating on the Bible. Why would people who are opposed to God want to read His book? We should not expect them to. Nor do we expect people like that to produce spiritual fruit. It is impossible to produce the fruit of the vine if you are not attached to the vine. Apple trees do not produce peaches.

Ultimately, God warned that these folks are like chaff. Chaff is the fine residue of husks that are removed from the heads of grain. In the process of winnowing, the wind blows that stuff away. Unlike the tree planted by the water, the chaff is useless and temporary. Having warned us not to be like them, John reminded us, *And the world is*

passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:17). What an accurate picture of chaff.

Therefore, because this is their character, the wicked do not fit in with the blessed people (v.5). They do not fit with God's standard of justice. *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment (v.5a).* In this life it often seems like the wicked are the successful people. David came to that conclusion and wrote, *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices (Psalm 37:7)!* We who love God tend to complain about that apparent reality. We say with Jeremiah, *"Righteous are you, O LORD, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?" (Jeremiah 12:1).*

But no one who is opposed to God will stand successfully before the Judge. In that day when insignificant and great people alike stand before God, the sinner will be helpless. At that time, they will finally acknowledge God's majesty and right.

The wicked will not fit in with the righteous people, *nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous (v.5b).* If sinful people cannot stand in the presence of God, why should we expect them to be comfortable in the gathering of God's people? In the day of judgment, none of God's people will be standing in the line before the Great White Throne. Then why would we think they would want to stand alongside us now?

They cannot be at ease with the happy people now because the wicked walk a road to destruction. *The way of the wicked will perish (v.6b).* The lifestyle of those who oppose God is destined for destruction both in this life and in eternity. The path of rejecting God is ever descending into hell. Though it appears to be popular and fun, in the end it results in heartache, loss, fractured relationships, and ruined health in this life. The wise person foresees that end and avoids it. Solomon understood that *the prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it (Proverbs 22:3).*

This is why our work of bringing sinners to know God is so trying and even downright painful. We hate the sin that controls these people's lives. We hate being around that sin. But we have to have some association with the sinners if we are going to be able to tell

them about Jesus. Sometimes we feel like Lot who lived in Sodom and tormented his righteous soul.

Worst of all, the LORD does not know these people. We rejoice because *the LORD knows the way of the righteous (v. 6a)*. God knows who they are. God who is all-knowing has to know who He created. If He knows when a bird falls out of its nest, His same all-seeing eye observes people who love Him. If He protects us like the apple of His eye, He knows who we are. The great difference between the person who is clothed in Christ's righteousness and the person who is opposed to God is that God will never say to us, "I never knew you."

God certainly knows the way of the righteous. He has full knowledge of and understands the path we walk. He designs the path specifically to help us conform more and more to the righteousness of Christ He gave us. People who are opposed to God cannot begin to understand that kind of personal care and work of God in our lives.

The words *blessed is the man* does not speak of some secret potion, some kind of special act of God like a divine zap through which God declares, "Presto, you're blessed!" *Being happy* is a result. The result of delighting in God's Word, walking in fellowship with God through His Word, and being known by God is to experience real happiness. Never believe the beer and alcohol commercials you see on television. Have you ever noticed that the people portrayed in those commercials are always the beautiful people who are having a good time? They are always happy! When they have opportunity, the same people portray Christians as Pilgrim-kind of folks dressed in black hats and drab clothing trudging their way through the snow to the little, cold church building on the edge of town, instead of joining the happy crowd at the football game in sunny Miami.

This text tells us not to be deceived into believing that lie for a moment. Wicked sinners are always on the path of destruction. Happy people are the ones who are walking in fellowship with God through His Word. Be one of the happy ones.