

# Sermon 4, How to Be Blessed, Psalm 1

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## **Introduction**

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, I hope you all know this psalm word-for-word. My mother made me memorize it when I was a child, and yours should have done so for you too. This psalm, as we have seen, is the gateway into the psalter. It describes the blessed man as the man who meditates on God's instruction, on His Torah. We have seen that, like all the psalms, this one is intended for public worship as one of the songs of the king. There is a great deal here; let's dive in and see that blessing is found in God's instruction rather than in foolish scoffing.

## **I. The Blessed Man, vv. 1-3**

Rather than defining blessedness, or saying “the blessed man is,” the psalmist begins by telling us “the blessed man does.” He describes this blessed man in three ways — by his enemies, by his delights, and by his similarity to the tree of life.

### **A. Known By His Enemies, v. 1**

Right away, we are told that the blessed man does not and will not do three things. He won't walk with the wicked, stand with the sinners, or sit with the scoffers. Let's look at each of these in turn.

#### **1. He Won't Walk in the Wicked's Counsel**

The blessed man is known, first of all, by where he doesn't walk. He doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked. We might expect it to say that the blessed man doesn't walk with the wicked. But that's not what it says. The blessed man may walk with the wicked, or even sit with them, like Jesus did with the tax collectors and sinners. But though he may physically be in the presence of the wicked, the blessed man's first notable characteristic is to reject the wicked's advice. He will not pay the slightest attention to their recommendations about how he should live his life.

Now, I hope that hits hard. I can say without hesitation that in this church, by and large we are the opposite of what this psalm says. Physically speaking, we stay away from the wicked. We don't go to bad neighborhoods; we don't go to bars or engage in commerce with drug dealers; we stay away from politicians. But we open our minds and hearts and ears to the counsel of the wicked all day long.

If you're accepting advice from the broader culture on how to think, if your opinions on politics, democracy, marriage, finances, parenting, eating, worshiping, and the other important things of life are shaped by non-Christian and wicked influences, then you are letting the wicked counsel you. From the woodenly literal (paying a non-believing counselor to give you life advice) to the slightly metaphorical (letting non-Christian child psychologists tell you how to raise your child), we are far too open to the counsel of the wicked.

The blessed man does not listen to the world's advice. He does not base his marriage or his worship on what the smart set are saying in the pages of the influential publications. He gets his advice from somewhere else — as we'll see in v. 2, from the Torah of Yahweh. He doesn't get it from psychologists and therapists and experts.

#### **2. He Won't Stand in the Way of Sinners**

The blessed man is also resolutely opposed to standing in the way of sinners. He is so far from being willing to be a fellow-traveler with sinners that he will not even set foot on their path.

There is a path around the lake across the street from my house. If I go and stand on that path, I'm not committing to walking around the lake. But I'm sure a lot more likely to walk around the lake while standing on that path than I am if I'm sitting comfortably back at my desk.

How might we stand in the way of sinners? You're not walking in their ways (yet), but you have set foot on the same path. What might that look like?

I would point to Jehoshaphat helping Ahab fight with the Syrians. Jehoshaphat was not necessarily doing anything personally wrong, but to be with Ahab while Ahab walked the path of wickedness was extremely dangerous, in both a physical and a moral sense.

If you have a friend or relative who is actively pursuing some kind of sin, and you go and do morally neutral things with that relative, that's what I would call standing in the path of sinners. You're not walking down their path. But you have put a foot, or both feet on it, and they are going to keep walking along it. It's a dead certainty that they are going to invite you to continue down the path with them. Thus, if your brother is a queer, if your sister is a tax evader, if your dad is an alcoholic, if your daughter is a habitual cost-shifter, beware. Doing too much with them, getting too friendly with them, puts you in a place where the relational pressure will be pushing you to do the wrong thing.

This is true, by the way, for people who are listening to the counsel of the wicked. If you insist on being relationally close to those people, you too are going to end up listening to the counsel of the wicked. If your friend is really into the Enneagram as a way of diagnosing and prescribing how to live, well, guess what? You'll get advice from the Enneagram whether you want it or not. If your buddy is really into cars, guess what? You'll get advice to spend more time on your car and less on your wife and children, whether you want it or not.

At some point that's not too far along the path, standing on the sinners' path makes listening to their advice unavoidable.

### **3. He Won't Sit in the Scoffer's Seat**

That's why the blessed man refuses to do both of those things. Above all, he shuns the seat of the scoffer. The blessed man is not a mocker. He treats God and the Devil with respect. He honors father, mother, wife, and children. In fact, he honors all men, loves the brotherhood, fears God, and honors the king.

The blessed man does not refer to office-holders in the state or the church by derogatory and derisive nicknames. He does not think that most things exist to be laughed at. He is reverent in his deportment, rather than irreverent. His speech is gracious, not cutting.

I will be the first to admit that I am given to the sin of scoffing. "Scoffer" is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride" (Pro 21:24 ESV). God forbid that I or any of you should occupy an endowed chair of mockery. If that is your reputation, if you own or ever have owned a shirt that says "sarcasm is my love language," then beware! You are not blessed.

### **B. Known By His Delights, v. 2**

Rather than hanging out with the wicked, listening to their advice, and scorning everyone and everything around him in pride, the blessed man finds delight in the Torah of Yahweh. That is, he loves the Bible.

#### **1. He Delights in Yahweh's Instruction, v. 2a**

The blessed man is the man who enjoys reading the Bible.

You might think of novels or political punditry or TV shows as more delightful than Scripture. They are certainly more entertaining. But if you prefer them to the law of the Lord,

you are in trouble. You are unblest. The blessed man — again, exemplified perfectly by Jesus Christ — loves the word of God and delights in God’s instruction.

How do you do that? Well, you have to have a spiritual sensitivity. If you are alive in Christ, you will find His word life-giving and nourishing. It will be delightful to you in the same way that a solid meat-and-potatoes kind of meal is delightful. The word will never be pleasurable like junk food. No one is going to say “I get a bigger hit from Scripture than I do from meth and porn.” But then, the first psalm is not talking about pleasure, but about delight — a long-lasting, solid joy.

Do you find Scripture to be that? Obviously, you should. But if you don’t, you need to develop a taste for it. How do you do that? You need to familiarize yourself with it, get to know your way around it, and see its beauty and loveliness. The more you see how wonderful it is, the more you’ll like it. Some people work really hard to develop a taste for expensive whiskey, or a taste for certain kinds of fish or something like that. If they can do it, surely you can learn to delight in something far better than the best whiskey and caviar — the law of the Lord.

## **2. He Thinks about Yahweh’s Instruction, v. 2b**

Not only does the blessed man delight in God’s law; he also thinks about it.

Meditation sounds hard. It isn’t. If you know how to worry, you know how to meditate. Meditation simply means thinking about something over and over, examining it from every angle. If you can worry for an hour about whether your boss will get a raise, or worry for a week about whether your mom is going to call you fat, then you can meditate on the truths of God’s word.

To meditate on God’s instruction, to think about it day and night, is the path to blessedness.

Do you see how complicated that is? Not very complicated. Enjoy God’s word and think about it all the time. That is the definition of blessedness. It’s not a list of thirteen things to do, or a statement that if you master an arcane set of notions and travel to Mecca five times you will be blessed. It sets before us a very simple task: read it and think about it, and do what it says. When you do, you will know God’s favor. You will have his good word of delight pronounced over you. In fact, the word “blessed” is plural in Hebrew — “the blessednesses of the man who walks not in wickedness but instead delights in Yahweh’s Torah!” Blessing is such a wonderful thing; it is God’s favor in your life. And if you meditate on His instruction, it’s yours.

## **C. Known By His Likeness to the Tree of Life, v. 3**

So the blessed man worries about God’s law — not in a negative way, meditating on potential problems, but in a positive way, delighting at length in the goodness of that law. And when he does that, the psalm tells us, “he shall be like a tree.” The writer then goes on to enumerate five points of comparison between the blessed man and the tree of life. It’s not that the blessed man is made of wood, or very tall, or suitable for burning. In every metaphor, there is a point of comparison, or a few points of comparison. One thing is like another in a certain way, or in certain ways — but they are not alike in every way. If they were, they would be identical things. Anyway, the blessed man is like a tree in the five ways that the psalm mentions.

### **1. Planted, Matthew 15:13**

First of all, the blessed man resembles a tree in this: He is planted. He is not wild, just randomly growing somewhere through the action of a bird dropping a seed. He is cultivated, fixed in the earth at just this spot by the gardener's care and attention. The Lord explained this statement further when He said, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up" (Mat 15:13 ESV). In its original context, Jesus says this to indicate that the Father did not plant the Pharisees and thus that they will not endure. They will be torn out by the roots. But the larger point is equally clear: The blessed man is one who has been called, regenerated, and planted by the Father, whom Jesus calls "the Vinedresser" or more literally, "the farmer" or "the tiller of the soil." If you aren't planted by the Father, you're not going to last and you're not going to be blessed.

So be saved! Seek God the Father for salvation, for planting so that you might grow in blessedness.

### **2. Watered**

The second way in which the blessed man is like a tree is that he is watered. God has planted him beside not just one stream, but multiple streams — beside the "rivers" or "streams" of water.

What does this metaphor signify? Well, a tree planted by multiple streams is going to flourish. It will always have what it needs in terms of nutrients and moisture. Thus, the metaphor is certainly making the point that the blessed man flourishes because he is well-supplied with what he needs. It is probably also referencing again the need to be watered with the word of God. The blessed man is blessed precisely because his life is saturated with God's word.

### **3. Fruitful**

The blessed man is like this tree in that he is fruitful. A fruitful tree is one that brings forth a large quantity of high-quality fruit — obviously. What does that mean in terms of the blessed man? The fruit that God is looking for is the fruit of good works. He wants to see us walk in obedience — in faith, hope, love, and joy. In fact, the fruits that this blessed man produces should be described as the fruits of the Spirit. Having been planted by the Father and watered by the Holy Spirit, he brings forth an abundance of good works.

### **4. Seasonable**

The fourth quality ascribed to this tree is that it is seasonable in its fruit. Now, an apple tree in this part of the world yields its apples in October. Apples picked in October are in season. Apples picked in June or February are not in season. And fruit out of season is simply not as good as fruit in season.

What is the season for good works? The answer, of course, is all the time! Just as the Tree of Life in Revelation bears fruit in all 12 months, so the blessed man does good works in all 12 months. Someone who says "I bear the fruits of the Spirit in December and January, like an orange tree bears oranges, and I don't bear again for 11 months" is not someone who is blessed. Good works are in season every day and every night, in every month and every climate. The tree is a seasonable tree; the blessed man is a seasonable man, which means that he is, like St. Thomas More, actually a man for all seasons.

## 5. Leafy

The final way in which the blessed man is like a tree is that his leaf does not wither. When a tree's leaf does not wither, that means that it does not go dormant or suffer drought stress. It is not dying, or even hibernating. It is in full bloom of growth. That is the blessed man. When his leaf does not wither, he is not withdrawing or dying back due to lack of inputs. His leaf is still green, photosynthesizing away — that is, he is growing up through faith to salvation.

In this metaphor, the stability and health of the blessed man are emphasized. He is shown to be one who does not change, one who does not grow really fast and then slow to a crawl. He is steady, faithful, fruitful, and relatively impervious to change and harsh conditions.

Is that you? Or do you know yourself to be more like the wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed? Oh, I beg you, be steady! To be blessed requires a steady, regular drawing upon the water of the word, a being planted by the Father, and a life fruitful in good works.

### **D. Known By His Prosperity, v. 3e**

The man who has all of these things will prosper in whatever he does.

Now, I said a moment ago that Jesus Christ is the perfectly blessed man of Psalm 1. I still believe that — and I think it is the best way to interpret this promise that whatever the blessed man does will prosper. How is that possible? After all, Jesus only gathered 120 disciples who believed in Him. He was crucified by a hostile state and rejected by the religious leaders of His own people. I wouldn't call that "whatever He did prospered."

But that, of course, is the point. Prosperity is not defined in terms of worldly success, in terms of the number of toys or of bodies, bucks, and buildings. The blessed man prospers, meaning that whatever he does is worked out for ultimate good by God's overruling providence. No matter what he does, he prospers, because everything he does is obedience to God. This prosperity may only be spiritual prosperity in this life, but it is headed for an eternal reward of prosperity.

So do you want to prosper? Then get into the word of God and stay there. That's where blessing is found; that's where comprehensive prosperity is to be located.

## **II. The Wicked Man, vv. 4-5**

The psalm then abruptly shifts from the beautiful description of the blessed man who resembles the tree of life by turning around and negating everything just said.

### **A. The Negation of the Blessed Man, v. 4a**

"Not so the wicked!" The psalm tells us that the wicked are nothing like what has been posited of the blessed man.

The first thing I want to observe here is that the psalm opposes, not being cursed to being blessed, but being wicked to being blessed. There is something significant and instructive in this contrast. We tend to think that good and bad are one thing, while cursed and blessed are another. Sometimes the righteous suffer; sometimes the wicked prosper. But by contrasting the blessed man with the wicked man, the psalm is insisting that ultimately, being good and being blessed are the same thing. The blessed man is the good man is the wise man is the disciplined man; the

cursed man is the bad man is the fool is the careless. The wicked are the negation of the blessed man across the board.

That means, of course, that the wicked do listen to the counsel of other wicked people. The wicked are eager to hear the terrible advice of their tribe; they delight to do exactly what they shouldn't; they walk on the path of sinners, and sit in the seat of scoffers. They have no relish for the law of the Lord, and they never think about it if they can help it. They are not like the tree of life — they aren't planted by the Father, they aren't watered by the word, they don't bring forth the fruit of good works, they do wither up and die, and whatever they do ultimately comes to nothing. That, my friends, is the summary of what the wicked are like.

### **B. Driven Away Like Chaff, v. 4b**

Indeed, they are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Rather than the good grain, the fruit of the land which is useful to feed animals and man, the wicked are the worthless chaff, good only for the wind to drive away.

The wicked do not endure; their day is coming, burning like an oven, when the chaff will vanish away forever.

### **C. Does Not Stand, v. 5**

So we are told that the wicked do not stand. The wicked fall: "Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of Sheol" (Pro 5:5), but "The way of life winds upward for the wise, That he may turn away from hell below" (Pro 15:24). The wicked sink down to Hell. They cannot stand, in two different places.

#### **1. In the Judgment, v. 5a**

The first place where the wicked cannot stand is in God's judgment. When He arises to judge the earth, they will be condemned. They will not pass the judgment of God; they will fall. To stand is to endure, but to fall is to fail to endure.

#### **2. In the Congregation of the Righteous, v. 5b**

Second, the wicked will not stand in the congregation of the righteous. That is, they will not remain in the worshiping assembly. They will be driven out, perhaps by a number of factors. We can think of their own distaste for the things of God, in the first place. The wicked will walk away from the church because they don't like or enjoy it. They would rather do anything else than worship God. We can think of the action of church discipline whereby Christ purges His church from evildoers. We can think of God's providence driving the wicked out so that they no longer bother His people. All of these things are ways in which the wicked do not and will not stand in the congregation of the righteous.

### **III. The Lord's Action, v. 6**

The psalm ends by speaking in a fascinating way. As one of the commentators pointed out, the language here takes the first link in the golden chain of salvation and applies it to the righteous, but takes the last link in the adamant chain of reprobation and applies it to the wicked. It's implying that the blessed man is only at the beginning, that things are going to get more and more blessed for him — and that the wicked man is also only at the beginning, but that his end is destruction and as he progresses toward it things will only get worse for him.

**A. Whom He Knew, . . . He Also Glorified, v. 6a**

Thus, the psalm tells us that Yahweh knows the way of the righteous. Obviously, this knowing is another way of saying “loving,” as in the sentence “Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore a son.” God knows your way; and whom He foreknew, He also called; whom He called, He also justified; whom He justified, He also glorified. To say that God knows the way of the righteous (here so called for the first time, rather than “blessed” as previously) is to say that He loves it, because it is the way of the people He knew and called and justified and will yet glorify.

**B. Depart from Me; I Never Knew You, v. 6b**

But the reverse is also true: those whose way He doesn't know will see their way destroyed. Not will they go to Hell, but their very way of life will perish. The righteous will speak forever, but the tongue of the wicked will be cut out! The wicked go away into everlasting destruction because He never knew them. That is the ultimate standard and the ultimate word of condemnation: I never knew you.

If He doesn't know you, you're dead. You're doomed.

Do you want to be blessed? Then know the Lord and be known by Him through His word. And if you want to be cursed, then forget about His instruction. The Torah of the LORD is perfect, and those who meditate and delight in it are blessed. Do you know Him? Do you love Him? Then trust Him from here to eternity. Amen.