
The Pilgrim's Lasting Fruit¹

Psalm 1²

Russ Kennedy

These are the songs of the pilgrim. But they are not just the songs of a pilgrim, wandering alone. They are the songs of a great company of pilgrims. Down through the ages, they have been called out by God from the place and people of their birth. Over the long years, they have been told more and more about who they are and what their God intends. Through sayings and songs, they come to know the great Pilgrim who would come one day and be God living in a human tent.

Pilgrims are travelers, not wanderers. They know they are on a journey. They affirm that this place is not their home. They will live here well. But they live with their hearts in the homeland and their eyes on Mt. Zion. They long for the King. They sometimes cannot see clearly because of the dirt of the world. They sometimes see through blurry tears. They sometimes stumble because the path is long, the way is weary and the body is weak. They travel in company with other pilgrims. And as they travel, they sing songs of the King. They sing of the King's people. And they sing most about home and the day the King comes.

The pilgrim's songs sometimes soar in worship. Sometimes they groan in pain. The pilgrims sometimes are perplexed. The pilgrim's songs are often sung to the King; but often they simply sing to each other with each other for each other. These songs tell the story of the heart, the landscape of the soul's wretchedness and wonders. These songs often are filled with wisdom. And they often soar with worship. But they are always sung in the walk. They are the songs of journey. They are sung by the sojourners.

So we will join the pilgrims and learn their songs. We will hear them and heed them and sing them. For we are also pilgrims.

¹ This series' manuscripts will be on the order of an expanded outline instead my usual full manuscript.

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Why are the pilgrims different from those around them? This Psalm sings about what makes the pilgrim a blessed person.

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;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

⁴ The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶ for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Their Character

(v.1-2)

As we watch the company of the pilgrims, look at how they are described.

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who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
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and on his law he meditates day and night.

In their blessedness

(v.1)

The pilgrims are described being blessed. What does this mean? How are we to understand this word and phrase?

Blessed can mean, being happy, having a sense of joy and wellbeing. It is as though the Psalms said, "Happy is the man who..."

Blessed can mean, receiving something good or desired, especially from God. It is as though the Psalmist said, "The man who... will receive good from God".

Blessed can mean, having God's approval. It is as though the Psalmist said, "Pleasing to God is the man who..."

While all three meanings are intertwined with one another, in this stanza, the pilgrim is one who is pleasing to God. They may be happy or joyful, but sometimes not. They may receive good from God that goes beyond their expectations. But because of what these pilgrims reject and embrace, they are pleasing to God. In the Old Covenant this blessedness comes through the covenant keeping of God's people. For us, this blessedness comes through the obedience of Christ. Our being pleasing to God flows out of our relationship with Christ who has always pleased His Father.

In what they reject

(v.1)

The blessed pilgrim rejects three sets of sad progressions:

They reject the downward progression in the way they live, in their lifestyle. This is marked by the three words, "Walk, stand and sit."

They reject the downward progression in the way they think, in who shapes their life. This is marked by the words, "Counsel, path and seat."

They reject where that lifestyle and counsel comes from as well as leads to. This is marked by the words, "Wicked, sinner and scoffers."

The pilgrim is aware of the dangerous slide into easy, comfortableness with the wicked. Christians who do not watch their hearts may be subtly drawn into becoming comfortable with the advice, lifestyle and eventually the scorn of the wicked.

The blessed pilgrim avoids and rejects the advice, counsel or words of the wicked. This is not just referring to formal counsel or casual advice. This is including all of the ways that unbelievers can influence and affect the pilgrim's thinking. I am not saying that we can avoid them all. But we should not be intentionally seeking them out. We should be poised to weigh carefully what is said to us. It is even more important to be discerning of those nice, moral, helpful, kind people who live next door to you.

One ancient commentator has noted, "[the Psalmist] shows how by little and little men are ordinarily induced to turn aside from the right path. They do not, at the first step, advance so far as a proud contempt of God; but having once begun to give ear to evil counsel, Satan leads them, step by step, farther astray, till they rush headlong into open transgression."¹

The blessed pilgrim is O so careful of the deceptive and destructive effect of becoming what the wicked are. These words for the unbeliever are essentially the same. They do point to different expressions of wickedness. "The 'ungodly' are people who are willfully and persistently evil; "sinners" are those who miss the mark of God's standards but who don't care; the "scornful" make light of God's laws and ridicule that which is sacred (see Prov. 1:22; 3:24; 21:24). When laughing at holy things and disobeying holy laws become entertainment, then people have reached a low level indeed."²

In what they embrace**(v.2)**

² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

The pilgrims get their direction for life from the Word of God. The Psalmist will often refer to the law of the Lord. This is the way the Scriptures are referred to. For David, the law is the Bible he has. His direction and guidance for pleasing God comes from God's Word. He turns away from the world and turns towards the Word.

The Psalm sings of a wonderful cycle that moves from delight in the Word to meditation on the Word. This leads to greater delight in the Word and deeper meditation in the Word. So your attitude towards the Scripture will cause you to move toward engaging the Word, or not. You will delight in something whose worth you value. You will desire what you delight in. And then you will engage the Word.

Meditation is an intentional concentration on the Word of God. We read it, write portions of it down, think on it. We "mutter it to ourselves through the day," So Biblical meditation is not some mysterious exercise of emptying the mind to hear God speaking in the inner man. Meditation is the taking in and thinking over the Word. Instead of emptying our minds, we fill our minds.

The godly person described in verses 1-3 is surely a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to John 14:6 is the way (v.1), the truth (v.2), and the life (v.3). He listened not to the words of the world. Jesus gave Himself to the Scriptures even though He is the very Word of God.

Their Comparison**(v.3)**

The Psalm sings about what the blessed pilgrims are like.

³ He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

Man is usually likened to changing grass, fading flowers, chaff (v.4). But a tree is:

A fixed thing - it has roots that are deep—"planted by rivers." Trees do not plant themselves. We are the "trees of the Lord." Pilgrims are God-planted.

A growing thing - whose roots draw up nourishment from "the rivers of water." Even when in the desert (Jeremiah 17) the well planted and watered pilgrim will grow sustained by the Word and Spirit of God. Pilgrims are God-nourished.

A living thing - during winter and summer keeps on developing—"leaf also shall not wither." Pilgrims have a God-imparted life.

A fruitful thing - Few objects in nature are so pleasing as a prosperous tree. We will "Yield our fruit in the right season." Pilgrims produce a God-given fruit.

Where they are planted

The water in the Old Testament is often used to refer to the Word of God and the Spirit of God. The blessed pilgrim will be someone whose roots go deep down into the Word. There faith is cultivated and obedience is rooted. My beloved, without the water of Word and Spirit in your soul, you will quickly wither and fail.

What they produce

The Christian is a fruitful tree. The life of God in our souls produces fruit in our lives. This fruit is of many different kinds. Sometimes it is called holiness and righteousness. Sometimes it is described as good works. But the apex of fruitfulness is those graces produced by the Spirit.

How they prosper

In the Old Testament, prospering was largely in material terms. To prosper meant to have good success in family, farm and business. But Christians on the journey are looking for a different kind of prospering. Yes, doing well in family and finances are always welcome. There is no spirituality to poverty. But we will not measure what prospering means by the counsel, the lifestyle, the values of the world. We look for prosperity in personal spiritual growth, corporate practical maturity, sustained ministry effort, commissional expansion and eternal reward. So the pilgrims may appear outwardly poor but yet are prospering in all the ways that matter.

Their Consideration

(v.4-6)

Notice the change in voice. The song now is not about the pilgrim. The Psalm now sings what the pilgrims observe, discern and conclude.

⁴ The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶ for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

What they Observe

(v.4)

They see that the wicked are not like fruitful trees. They are like chaff. Chaff is the husk around wheat. When wheat was harvested it was taken to threshing floors. There it was beaten or threshed to break the chaff loose from the wheat. Then it was thrown up into the air. Because the chaff was very light, the wind blew it away and the heavier wheat fell back to the ground. The pilgrims are fruitful trees. The wicked are wind blown chaff.

What they Conclude

(v.5)

They conclude then that the wicked will not stand before God's judgment. Nor will they stand in the company of God's people. The wicked cannot stand before God or among God's people. The pilgrim then sees the future facing the wicked. While the pilgrims live in the world among the wicked, the wicked will have not place in the pilgrims' final home.

Why It is True

(v.6)

All of this is true because of God. He knows them both. He knows their ways. He approves and watches over the pilgrims' way. He does not just know about them but knows them intimately. It seems that the way of the righteous is permanent and lasting. That is because the way of the wicked will come to an end. Like their ways, the wicked will come to an end in judgment.

Reflect and Respond

Whose advice and counsel guides your life? Does your lifestyle reflect that?

Do you desire the Word of God? Do you delight in it in such a way that you engage it regularly? If you don't then you will have nowhere to go but to the world. And that is the pathway that leads to sin against God and scorn of His Word.

Does your life spiritually look like a growing, fruitful tree?

How do you measure success in your life? Finish this sentence: I am prospering when...

How do you think of the wicked? Do you admire them and their ways? I am not talking about gross sinners; I am talking about the nice moral neighbor who does not believe in God. Do you witness to them? If they do not believe, their way will perish. They will end up in hell.

May you be a blessed pilgrim, delighting in God's Word, growing in maturity and bearing spiritual fruit.

¹ Calvin, John and James Anderson. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010. V.1P.3. All quotes from Calvin have been edited by the author to modernize the language.

² Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Worshipful*. 1st ed. "Be" Commentary Series. Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 2004, p.13.