

Introduction

First off this morning, I want to thank Pastor Groves, Joel Ebert, and Doug Ferrell for filling in for me while I took my annual sabbatical. I had some rest and relaxation, a break from the routine, and good time with family.

I am going to take a break from our series on the life of David and come back to it after spending some time in the New Testament. The next series I want to do will be on the Epistle to the Galatians. I plan to begin that series on Kick Off Sunday, September 10. Meanwhile, for the next two weeks I am going to take it one week at a time. This morning I want to preach on Psalm 1. It is a favorite of mine as the psalms go and as I looked back in my records, it was surprising for me to realize I had not preached on this text since I have been at Grace. So let's dig in.

[Read text and Pray]

Happiness is something everybody wants. You could have everything this world has to offer, but if you are unhappy, it means nothing. You can have peace, health, material wealth, pleasure, purpose, and time. But what is peace without happiness? What is health without happiness? What is time without enjoying it? What is life if you are not happy? The answer is misery. And so many people live life thinking that if they just had one more thing, they would be happy. This psalm presents the portrait of a person who is deeply, truly, and lastingly, indeed eternally happy. Everyone desires happiness, but people go about achieving it in many, many ways that simply do not deliver. Psalm 1 is God's word on human happiness. It is also God's word on unhappiness and misery. So if you want to be happy, listen up. As we unfold the text, let's begin with the first word, blessed.

I want you to see . . .

I. The Concept of Happiness.

You might be wondering where I have come up with the emphasis on happiness when the word happy does not appear in the entirety of the text.

Or you might have already figured out that the concept of happiness has something to do with the very first word in the psalm—blessed. This word means supremely happy or abundantly fulfilled. The very first word in the whole of the Psalms is the same as the first word uttered by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount—blessed. Of course the word in psalms is Hebrew and the word in Jesus' sermon is Greek, but they are the same concept. Having wired human beings to seek blessedness, God holds before us the hope and the assurance that the supreme happiness of abundant blessing for which we long IS possible. In fact, it is not only possible, it is PROMISED. It is a promised reality for those certain individuals who take the way of happiness and blessedness.

Before we get into the way of happiness, I want to develop in our minds the concept of happiness about which the text speaks. When we think of the concept of happiness in the world today, a popular song by Pharrell Williams may come to mind. It suggests that when you're happy, you feel like a room without a roof, whatever that is. You are carefree and nothing is going to get you down. I like singing along with the happy tune of that song. But it never addresses what it is that makes a person happy. It seems rather to describe the sensations when a person is in a happy mood. And let me tell you what you already know. Happy moods come and go.

Having spent a couple days last week with a four-and-a half-year-old and a two-year-old, I have seen those complete moods swings transpire in a matter of moments. There they were, swinging in the hammock, laughing and carrying on, being silly, and being happy. But it all changed suddenly when the hammock turned upside down and abruptly deposited both on the ground. The giggles and smiles were gone. Neither was happy.

The Hebrew word for blessed here in Psalm 1 occurs in the plural form. It seems to suggest the lavish nature and variety of the benefits that overflow into the experience of the one who is blessed. The richness of blessing promotes a happiness which is more than a mood. It is a deeply-rooted state of ongoing optimism and contentment that is solid and persevering. This kind of happiness is not a passing and momentary emotion. It is not a mood. It exists even in the face of trial and affliction, of an awareness of one's spiritual poverty, of mourning over sin, and of hungering and thirsting for righteousness. It is a happiness that resounds when the hammock is right-side-up and abides when the hammock is upside down. It is a sort of happiness that will not let go of the Lord no matter what. It is a sort of happiness that will not relent in trusting the Lord, like when Job declared, "even though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

This happiness is grounded in a confidence of the truth of what the Apostle says in Ephesians about God's purpose for his people in Christ. He "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:6-7) If you know and believe this to be true about you, and if you let your mind ponder over all that this blessing involves, you will know supreme happiness.

And this is what the psalmist is talking about when he says, "Blessed is the man." Such a man is truly, deeply, richly, and perseveringly happy. It is satisfyingly assuring to know this to be true. If you are not happy today in this way, you should know that God cares for your happiness. He does not promise that all will be just the way you in your flesh would like to order things. It is not a promise of material riches, popularity, intelligence, or happy-mood circumstances, but of something MUCH better, much deeper, much fuller, and much more enduring. Fundamentally, it is the promise of God himself. He gives himself to his people, and that is what this kind of happiness consists of. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. If you are delighted in him, then you have him and all that he desires to give you. And what he wants you to have above all is a character like his. This is a happiness that rejoices in the Lord.

Do you desire this true and lasting happiness in your life? God himself is the pursuit which will result in it. This psalm as it continues characterizes what that pursuit looks like.

So let's turn then, to ...

II. The Pursuit of Happiness.

The pursuit of happiness is the pursuit of God. And the psalmist as he continues depicts for us what that pursuit looks like. It is characterized by what it avoids, what it absorbs, and what it analogizes.

A. The psalmist first tells us what the pursuit of happiness AVOIDS. He says, he "walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers." These are the things the blessed person avoids. Proverbs 27:12 says, "The prudent sees danger and hides himself from it." Here are three dangers from which the blessed one hides. He avoids them. These are not three entirely separate dangers but three steps of progression deeper and deeper into danger.

It starts with the counsel of the wicked. Our world abounds with wicked counsel. At the root of that counsel is the presumption of suspicion and questioning of what God has said. That's the way it was in the garden of Eden. When Satan approached Eve, his first words were, "Did God actually say?" The world counsels us to seek happiness through the violation of God's commands. It begins with a view of the world which shuts God out and urges us to live accordingly.

And if we begin to listen to the counsel of the world and doubt what God has said, we will soon find ourselves standing in the way of sinners. We will move from listening to participating with the world in the way of sin. Consequently, we will eventually become hardened in our hearts and actually seat ourselves with the world in a position of scoffing at God and what he has said. Doubt is fed by wicked counsel. Doubt is entertained and embraced when sinful patterns of life are adopted, rationalized, and defended. And when the course is complete, the heart becomes callous and hard. There is a resulting defiance and denial of the truth and of righteousness.

I know some people like this. There may be some in this room today. And if it is you, then you ought to stop and be arrested by the fact that the Bible has you pegged. Your heart is hard and defiant. And the Bible tells you just how you got to where you are. If it can diagnose your condition, then maybe you should begin to listen to what it says and have done with the counsel of the wicked and flee from the path of sinners so that you will avoid sitting in the seat of scoffers. And perhaps you will avoid the outcome for the wicked.

What is that outcome? Look down to verse 6. Those who walk, stand, and sit with the wicked will not walk in the counsel of God's law; they will not stand in the judgment; and they will not sit in the congregation of the people of God. The way of the wicked will perish. The wicked are unfruitful. They lack life. They will falter before the judgment of God. They will be excluded from the joys of the people of God, and they will perish. Their lives will all be for judgment. Their pursuit of happy moods will result in eternal misery. Judgment will be inflicted and the flames of eternal torment will not be quenched. Their misery will go on and on forever.

It is an outcome that no one could want. And it is the outcome that the blessed ones avoid. They avoid it because they avoid sitting in the seat of scoffers and standing in the way of sinners and they repudiate the counsel of the wicked. Would you desire to avoid all this? Then pay careful attention to the instruction of this psalm. It tells you how to avoid the way of the wicked and the destiny thereof.

B. The way of the blessed is marked by what it avoids, but the pursuit of happiness is also marked by what it absorbs. It avoids the counsel of the wicked with the terrifying consequences thereof, but it absorbs the counsel of God. If you want to be happy for the rest of your life, truly happy, deeply happy, and eternally happy, it starts with the joyful absorption of the word of God. Let's dig in to verse 2. "His delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law he meditates day and night."

The reference to the law of the LORD is not tied merely to the Ten Commandments or the law of Moses within the scriptures but is a reference to the scriptures as a whole. If we turn over to Psalm 119 we will notice several different synonyms all of which refer to the totality of the word of God. There is law, precepts, statutes, testimonies, commandments, and even the works of God. The law of the Lord here is the book of God's law. Since the day of the psalmist, that book has expanded to include the law, the prophets, the writings, and the New Testament gospels, epistles, Acts, and Revelation.

Now the one who is blessed in the way of Psalm 1 has set his heart on this word of God. The psalmist says, "his delight is in the law of the LORD." He treasures the word of God. He enjoys it. He spends time with it. He takes pleasure in what it teaches, what it counsels, and who it displays. It is the law of the Lord; it puts the Lord on display before our eyes and hearts. Delight is far more than an academic interest in a subject. The delight in the law of the LORD is the joy of knowing and relating to God through his word, through his commands, through his testimonies, and through his works. The beauty of the Bible is captivating; the truth it communicates is satisfying; and the God it displays is ravishing. Hence the blessed one delights in the law of the LORD.

Now, one's delight in God's word is evidenced in the activity towards God's word. "On his law he meditates day and night." You think about the things you love. The things you love are the things you think about. You think about the things you love and you love the things you think about. Jesus said, "where your treasure is there your heart will be also." What you treasure is what you value. And what you value you make time for. And what you make time for is what you delight in.

One of our family traditions when we go to Door County is getting an evening ice cream at Wilson's in Ephraim. At least once during our visit, we make it a point to go there. We take the time because we value the experience. A lot of other people do it too. So when you go you take a number and wait. And while you are waiting you have time to think what flavor you will order. And you ponder in your mind what the taste of the different flavors is like. When at last your number is called, you make your decision and place your order. They put that cone in your hand and you begin to lick and absorb the deliciousness of the ice cream to your delight. If you are like I was last week, you order way too much and the drops of ice cream splatter on the ground and you can't handle it all, but the delight in it led you to order a lot. I can still bear in mind the memory of "Shipwreck." That's the flavor I chose. A ribbon of caramel wound its way through the rich vanilla ice cream which was punctuated with candied almonds. MMMM. I can meditate even at this moment on how good it tasted.

Delight in the word of God is demonstrated by the time we spend meditating on it, remembering it, savoring it, even when we are not reading it. The blessed man, the truly happy man, CONSTANTLY ruminates on the word of God.

He meditates. Meditation is not taking up a certain physical posture and emptying your mind. Rather, regardless of your physical posture, it is the act of filling the mind with the word of God. It asks questions of it. It seeks a complete understanding of it. It rejoices in it. It thinks how to apply its truths to every possible facet of living, thinking, and acting. It praises God for it. Meditation on the word of God corresponds to walking in the counsel. It strives to hear the counsel of God rightly and stand in its way. The delight in the law of God leads to sitting in the seat not of the scoffer but of the worshiper of God who delights in his way. He does not scoff at the Lord. He adores the Lord; he trusts the Lord; he worships the Lord.

Do you love the Lord? Do you worship the Lord? Do you trust the Lord? The truthfulness of your profession will be evident in what you do with the word of the Lord. You can't say you love God if you do not delight in his word. And you can't say you delight in his word if you do not meditate on it consistently. Now admittedly, meditating on the word may require discipline, but we discipline ourselves for the things we love.

C. Let's look next at what the pursuit of happiness analogizes. An analogy is when you illustrate the nature of a thing by comparison. The psalmist analogizes the blessed man with the image of a tree.

"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." What an analogy!

A person who meditates constantly on the scripture is like a tree whose roots are constantly being hydrated. The steady stream of God's nourishing word supplies everything necessary to flourish. He or she never lacks, never runs dry.

As a result, this person is fruitful. His or her purpose is fulfilled. Their life is beneficial to others and it pleases God. God made us to love him and love our neighbor. We were made to please God be devoted to God and to serve the well-being of our neighbors. That's what fruit does. It fulfills a tree's purpose and benefits others. A life that delights in the word of God will fulfill its purpose of glorifying God and blessing the lives of others. We were made to share our fruit and communally rejoice with the congregation of the righteous and bless even the wicked so as to summon them to a life of true blessing.

A person who meditates constantly on the scripture is like a tree whose leaf does not wither. Not only is he fruitful; he is also steady, consistent, persevering. The constant supply of truth keeps his heart from growing weary in well-doing. And he prospers in whatever he does. This is not the false prosperity gospel, friends. It is the true prosperity gospel. The gospel does promise prosperity. God's word does promise welfare and success, but not worldly welfare and success. It promises welfare and success from the perspective of heaven. Perspective makes a vast difference. The Bible's idea of prosperity is not health and wealth and a problem-free life. The Bible's idea of prosperity is sinners being regenerated, justified, and becoming like Jesus. And that's what happens in the lives of those who delight in the word of God and meditate upon it day and night. We become more and more like Christ no matter what. God works all things for the good of transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. Biblical prosperity is not about what happens on the outside but what happens on the inside.

But none of this would be possible to any of us in our own strength. As we consider the importance of avoiding the counsel of the wicked and absorbing the counsel of God, we need to see it all in the context of the whole of scripture. What you must do, you can't do without the grace of God. And his grace begins with the one who is the true tree of life. Jesus is the only human being (the God-human) able to fulfill on his own what this text is talking about. Only Jesus perfectly avoids the counsel of the wicked, the way of sinners, and the seat of scoffers. Only Jesus perfectly delights in the law of God and meditates in it day and night. Only Jesus is a tree that is perfectly nourished and yields its fruit and never withers and always prospers. If you want what this text promises, you can have it but not apart from Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." To turn to God is to stop trying to please him in our own fleshly efforts and to trust in the person and work of Jesus who succeeded in atoning for our sins and being raised to life after death on our behalf. The fruit of the tree of life, which is Christ, benefits all who trust in him with a new heart, forgiveness of sins, being counted righteous, protection from perishing, and sharing in the congregation of the righteous. If you have not turned to Jesus Christ in faith, and you want to know true and lasting happiness through peace with God, turn to him today. Forsake the counsel of the wicked, flee from the way of sinners, humble yourself before the holy yet gracious God and be reconciled with him by faith. Take God at his word and trust in the work of Jesus.

We then delight in the word of the Lord, NOT in order to be right with him and become righteous. Rather we delight in the word of the Lord in order to be more like the One who alone IS righteous and has shared that righteousness with us. Jesus alone fulfills the pattern of Psalm 1. Our task is not to try really hard to be what we cannot. Our objective is having come to faith in Christ, to respond with gratitude and genuine delight in God and his word.

It is to come to him with the understanding set forth by William Cowper in these lines: "To see the law by Christ fulfilled and hear his pardoning voice changes a slave into a child and duty into choice."

By grace and by gratitude let us be moved to delight in God's word and by it be transformed into oaks of righteousness the planting of the Lord.

To be a tree like this one is not to be like the wicked. They are not planted but are driven by the wind. And there are but two categories here—the wicked and the righteous. This is the way it is in the scripture. There is no in between. In fact we are all wicked by nature and by birth. We can only become classified as righteous through the gracious visitation of God upon our lives through Christ.

III. The Root of Happiness.

The root of the happiness about which this psalm speaks is found in verse 6. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous. He watches over their path because they are precious to him.

Whenever a loved one of mine is flying, I monitor their progress through an app on my phone called flight aware. It lets you know when the plane takes off, what the altitude is, and how fast the plane is traveling. It even shows you where the plane is and what is the flight plan and how they deviate from it in certain situations. Finally, of course, you can see when the plane has landed and is safely on the ground. It is always a comfort to be able to watch.

In a far greater way than flight aware, the Lord KNOWS the way of the righteous. He watches over our path to guide us home to heaven. What really matters is being known by God, being loved by God, being precious to God. And that's what the righteous are. He watches over their way to guide us home to him, to join in the congregation of the righteous where with all the people of God we will rejoice before him.

Conclusion

So, let me ask you this. Do you meditate on the word of God? Night and Day? Do you delight in the word of the Lord and the Lord of the word? Have you fallen into the counsel of the wicked and is it leading you to the path of sinners? This morning, hear the summons, the gentle wooing of the Lord, to come away from the world's influences upon your thinking. Come to the living water of the Lord. Come drink and be delighted in his word. Devote yourself in the strength of the Lord to being molded in your thinking and in your living to the transforming word of God where you meet the Lord in all of his glory.