

Psalm 1 –The blessing of being a child of God

The first two psalms in the collection we know as the Book of Psalms form an introduction to the whole book:

Psalm 1 focusses on the character of those who know God and the blessings that are theirs – the character that should mark us and the blessings that belong to us

Psalm 2 tells us that whatever we may think about the state of this world and the way it is going, God **will** establish the rule of his king – his Messiah – over all the world. His kingdom will come and his will at last be done on earth as in heaven.

This evening we are looking together at Psalm 1.

Note how this Psalm – indeed, how the whole Book of Psalms – begins: “Blessed is the one ...” The word “blessed” could equally well be translated, “happy”. Here is the description of the person who is truly happy. This Psalm tells us that the person who knows God and who devotes themselves to pleasing God is the person who is truly happy while the person who lives without regard for God is the miserable person. That’s not what the world around us thinks: the world thinks that living to please yourself is the recipe for happiness and that “religious” people are guilt-ridden and miserable. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are the most happy of people. We need to show the world that this is so.

Bear this thought in mind as we look together at this psalm.

The holy character that should mark God’s people vv. 1-2

Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

What does holiness mean? A word seldom used nowadays, even among Christians – except when speaking of God. The root meaning of the word ‘holy’ is ‘separate’; holiness means being separate. This is what is described in the first verse of this psalm.

But what does this mean in practical terms? Some Christians have interpreted this as a call for a kind of physical separation from the rest of the world. They have tried to live in their own separate community and have as little to do with the rest of the world as possible. But this is not what God wants of us, nor is it the way he calls us to live.

God’s call to us is to be distinctively different in the way we live – a difference which springs from a different heart and different motivations. He wants us to be a people whose lives are not shaped by the world around us but are shaped by who we are as God’s people: from a longing to know God and to please God; shaped by a delighted reading of and listening to his word (v.2). We are to keep in step with the Spirit and not with the character of the world around us.

Who was the most perfectly holy human being who ever walked the earth? It was our lovely Lord Jesus Christ. He was and is “holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). His life was not shaped by that of others around him who did not know God as he did; his life was shaped by a devotion to the Father and to doing the his will. But Jesus did not keep himself physically separate from “sinners”. On the contrary, those in his day who separated themselves from others and thought of themselves as holy and righteous complained of Jesus that he was often found in the presence of “sinners” and of the outcasts and dregs of society. Jesus was found often in their company because these are those for whom he came into the world. When Jesus was among such people his presence touched and transformed them – he was not polluted by their presence.

We are called to be like the Lord Jesus, to be a people who hear his voice and follow him. We are not called to physical separation from the world around us or from the people of this world, but we are called not to conform to this world but to be transformed by a mind continually renewed by the

presence and power of the risen Saviour. We are called to be a people who bring the transforming presence of Jesus Christ into every situation we are in.

The promise of God to his people v.3

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither –
whatever they do prospers.

Much of the land of Israel is very dry and its trees are often small, skeletal and bare. But, in contrast, a tree planted by a stream would be green and fruitful. Jesus spoke of himself as being the source of streams of living water. He calls us to be rooted deeply in him. Listen to Paul's prayer for the Christians in Ephesus in Ephesians 3:14-19:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

And again in Colossians 2:6-7:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

The life rooted in Jesus Christ bears fruit, abundant fruit, fruit that will last. Jesus portrayed this graphically in the parable he told of the vine and the branches (John 15). Branches joined to the vine bear fruit; lives lived in close fellowship with Jesus bear fruit to the glory of God – without him we can do nothing.

"Whatever they do prospers", promises the psalm. This is no "prosperity gospel". God does not promise to make us prosperous in terms of our finances or possessions. This is a kingdom promise; lives lived in communion with Jesus will result in the kingdom prospering and increasing.

There could not be a greater contrast between the flourishing life of the one who lives in close communion with Jesus and the person who cares nothing for God and lives only to please themselves. Their lives are described as being like chaff which the winds of judgment and of eternity will blow away:

The Lord watches over the path of the godly,
but the path of the wicked leads to destruction (v.6, New Living Translation)

The bottom line

The life devoted to God is a life worth living. That's an understatement. The life devoted to God is the only life worth living. It is the most blessed, the most happy of lives. It's a life that counts for something. It does not reflect the character of this world but brings the transforming presence of the Lord Jesus into each and every action, conversation and relationship. It brings streams of living water into the thirsty deserts of a world without God – it brings blessing. It breathes in deeply of the life of the kingdom and breathes that life out, giving life to others. It counts for eternity.

Jesus calls us to live holy lives, lives wholly devoted to him. Let's hear his call and follow him.