

# Psalm 1

“A Christian’s Guide”

July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023

## 1. Intro

- a. In 1657, the Puritan preacher, Thomas Watson, wrote a rather long publication to all of the people who lived in his parish
  - i. This publication was called “The Saint’s Spiritual Delight,” and it serves as a fantastic exposition on Psalm 1 (you can actually find the entire text online for free!)
  - ii. At the beginning of his thoughts on Psalm 1, Watson writes these words,
    1. “This Psalm may rightly be called the ‘Psalm of Psalms,’ for it contains in it the very quintessence of Christianity... it may well be called ‘A Christian’s Guide,’ for it discovers the quick sands where the wicked sink down in perdition, and the firm ground on which the saints tread to glory.”
      - a. I have to be honest with you... I had to look up the word “quintessence!”
        - i. Webster’s Dictionary defines it as, “the essence of a thing in its purest and most concentrated form”
        - ii. So in Watson’s estimation, Psalm 1 represents the purest and most concentrated example of what it means to be a Christian
          1. And his reason for giving Psalm 1 such high praise is that it provides the guide by which we stay on the narrow path, and avoid all the “quick sands that lead to perdition”
      2. This is a helpful illustration for us today, isn’t it?
        - a. For these “quick sands” seem like they’re getting harder and harder to escape
          - i. Just turn on the news for 5 minutes, and you see very clearly that, despite all of our technological achievements and scientific discoveries, we are a people who are rapidly DE-volving – not Evolving
          - ii. As the world boasts of its progressiveness in every area, the Christian looks on in great horror wondering, “Can things get any more evil?”
            1. And then you turn on the news the next day and you see that, yes, in fact, things CAN get worse
          - iii. The quick sands where the wicked sink down into perdition are all around us, and they are rapidly growing in number
          - iv. Therefore, it is imperative that we find the firm ground on which the saints tread to glory
            1. It’s imperative that we know where and how a Christian ought to tread
            2. It’s imperative that we show our kids and our grandkids where and how a Christian ought to tread
      - iii. As Watson noted, Psalm 1 provides our guide for how to find this firm ground on which we must tread
        1. And so, we look to this Psalm that stands as the “quintessence of Christianity...”

## 2. Psalm 1

- a. *<sup>1</sup>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; <sup>2</sup>but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. <sup>5</sup>Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; <sup>6</sup>for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*
- b. Our outline for this Psalm will be as follows...
  - i. Wickedness defined
  - ii. Wickedness condemned

- iii. Blessedness defined
- iv. Blessedness praised
- 3. So first, wickedness defined
  - a. Psalm 1 gives us three different categories that we can use to define wickedness...
    - i. The COUNSEL of the wicked
    - ii. The ACTIONS of the wicked
    - iii. The HOUSE of the wicked
  - b. It's interesting to note that Psalm 1, the first of the Bible's sacred hymns, starts out with a focus on the NEGATIVE, rather than the positive
    - i. It doesn't start out by saying, "Blessed is the man who delights in the Law of the Lord," but INSTEAD, "Blessed is the man who DOES NOT" do all these other things
      - 1. There is good reason for this approach, if we think about it in today's context
        - a. We can tell people all day long that "Jesus loves you," and many will accept that without even breaking stride
          - i. As long as they can be told that Jesus loves them, and they can continue to go on living whatever life they want to live, they're great with that, aren't they?
            - 1. But that's not the message of Christianity, is it?
        - b. The message of Christianity is YES, Jesus DOES love you
          - i. But Jesus ALSO calls all who wish to follow him to DIE to themselves
          - ii. This forces us to make a hard choice
        - c. That is what is happening in Psalm 1 as well
          - i. The Psalmist wants us to see right from the start that the truly blessed man CANNOT love the ways of the world AND ALSO love the law of the Lord
            - 1. These things will ALWAYS compete with one another
      - ii. So the Psalmist begins with a focus on three negatives, progressively making the path of the BLESSED man more and more narrow
    - c. First, the COUNSEL of the wicked
      - i. In verse 1, the Psalmist writes, "*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked...*"
        - 1. The question that this should immediately cause us to ask is, "Who are we listening to?"
          - a. Who are we going to for advice? Who are we going to for counsel?
            - i. It used to be that if you were having a medical issue, or some kind of ache or pain, you would go to the doctor to have him look at whatever was going on
              - 1. He is the professional, so he should have the correct advice, right?
            - ii. But that's not what we do today, is it?
              - 1. No, the first thing we do today when we have an ache or a pain is that we go to Google
                - a. I don't want to deal with those pesky doctors... surely I can find someone else who will give me the answers I want
                - b. Admit it, that's what we do, right?!
          - 2. Unfortunately, that is ALSO so often what we do when it comes to our spiritual health
            - a. Rather than seeking the godly wisdom of someone who is actively walking with the Lord, someone who is immersed in the Word of God, we instead go to Google... or YouTube... or Facebook
              - i. And there are COUNTLESS people on these platforms who want to give you all sorts of counsel
                - 1. But the problem is that 99% of it is "the counsel of the wicked"
                - 2. You aren't happy in your marriage?
                  - a. Surely God doesn't want you to be unhappy, so maybe its time to go ahead and get a divorce and move on
                - 3. You aren't happy with your gender?
                  - a. Surely God didn't make a mistake when He created your desires, so if everyone else says you're a boy, but deep





- a. This process would loosen the kernels of wheat from their husks, or shells
        - i. The workers would then use a rake to toss the kernels and shells up in the air
        - ii. The kernels that would be used for bread and nourishment and sustenance would fall to the ground
        - iii. Everything else, the useless chaff, would be driven away by the wind
      - ii. This is the end for those who walk in the counsel of the wicked
        - 1. They will be like the chaff that the wind drives away
    - c. And if you choose to stand in the way of sinners, then you will not be able to stand in the judgment, nor will you be able to stand in the congregation of the righteous
      - i. The Bible is unapologetically clear on this, my friends
        - 1. There WILL be a Day of Judgement, when every man, woman, and child – from throughout ALL of history – will stand before God to answer for their choices in this life
          - a. And the Psalmist says that the sinner will not stand in that day
            - i. They will be bowed down low to the ground, as they finally realize the weight of their rebellion against their Father
            - ii. They will fall down in terror as they realize the extent of their treason against their King
            - iii. They will NOT stand in the judgement
          - b. Nor will they stand in the congregation of the righteous
        - 2. Jesus will make a separation on that Day...
          - a. His sheep will be on one side, and the goats will be on the other
          - b. And he will look at the sinners and say, “Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness, for I never knew you.”
        - 3. This is the end for all who stand in the way of sinners
    - d. And for all those who choose to sit in the seat of scoffers, they will find that the way of the wicked will perish
      - i. For it is the path of destruction
      - ii. It is the road full of quick sands, where the wicked sink down in perdition
        - 1. And Jesus says that MANY will choose to walk down this road
        - 2. And FEW will choose to enter through the narrow gate
        - 3. FEW will choose to tread the hard path that leads to glory
      - iii. This is the condemnation of the wicked
        - 1. It is certain... it is sure... it is clearly defined
    - e. So it would be really easy to wrap up this sermon at this point, and leave you with the message:
      - i. Don’t follow the advice of the wicked
      - ii. Don’t act like sinners
      - iii. And don’t choose the easy road of dwelling in the house of the scoffers
        - 1. That would make for a really good end to a typical sermon
        - 2. It would also be a really good way to create a bunch of Pharisees!
          - a. You see, even though we MUST take the time to focus on these negative aspects of Christianity in order to make a distinction between the true follower of Christ and the world, these negative aspects are NOT the Gospel!
            - i. The Gospel is NOT “do good things, and don’t do bad things”
              - 1. The Gospel is “You are FULLY INCAPABLE of doing good things, and therefore CHRIST has come to cover you in HIS goodness!”
      - iv. Which leads us to the great shift in this Psalm, as we move to our third point,
5. Blessedness Defined
  - a. And as we look at blessedness defined, we are instantly faced with our own insufficiency and inability to attain this blessedness
    - i. Look at verse 2,
      - 1. Blessed is the man who does not walk according to all the ways of the wicked, but instead, as verse 2 says,
        - a. *“His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.”*

- ii. Do you see?
  - 1. The Psalmist doesn't say, "Blessed is the man who dutifully obeys the law"
  - 2. He doesn't say, "Blessed is the man who checks all the right boxes"
    - a. He says, "Blessed is the man who DELIGHTS in the law of the Lord"
      - i. Blessed is the man who takes great pleasure in the law of the Lord
      - ii. Blessed is the man whose heart's affections are set on the law of the Lord
      - iii. Blessed is the man whose one overwhelming desire is to live by the law of the Lord
    - b. And this delight, this desire, this pleasure in the law is absolutely impossible apart from the work of the Spirit of God
  - 3. This is what Israel failed to realize, over and over and over again throughout their history
    - a. And this is what the Pharisees failed to realize as well
      - i. You see, God was never looking for a people who simply looked good on the outside
        - 1. These were just whitewashed tombs, or cups that looked really clean on the outside, but were full of filth on the inside
      - ii. No, God's desire has ALWAYS been for a people whose HEARTS were set on Him
    - 4. And, because of the sin and wickedness that resides in ALL of our hearts, God knew that He would have to give us NEW hearts
- iii. This is the message of Ezekiel 36, when God says in verses 25-27,
  - 1. *<sup>25</sup>"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup>And I will give you a NEW heart, and a NEW spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."*
    - a. This isn't something that WE can achieve
    - b. This isn't something that WE can work really hard to attain
    - c. It is only BY GRACE that you have been saved!
      - i. It is only BY GRACE that God has given you a NEW heart and a NEW spirit
      - ii. It is only by GRACE that the Holy Spirit now dwells within you, and you now DELIGHT in the law of the Lord
- iv. This is ONLY possible by the grace of God the Father
  - 1. It is ONLY possible by the regenerating power of God the Holy Spirit
    - a. And it is ONLY possible through faith in God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ
  - 2. This is the definitive proclamation of the Christian faith:
    - a. YOU CANNOT DO IT YOURSELF!!
      - i. While every other religion in the world says to you that you must earn your way back into God's favor, Christianity stands alone in saying this:
        - 1. You CANNOT earn your way back into God's favor
          - a. For your heart will always long for the counsel of the wicked
          - b. Your heart will always want to walk in the way of sinners
          - c. Your heart will always want to dwell in the house of the world
        - 2. Therefore, the only solution is that God must give you a NEW heart – a heart that DELIGHTS in His law
      - b. And that is exactly what He has done in Jesus Christ
        - i. Jesus not only went to the cross to pay the payment that was required by your sin
        - ii. But he has also imputed his righteousness, his goodness, his holiness, upon all whom the Father has given to him
        - iii. And therefore, your heart of stone has been removed, and a heart of flesh has been put in its place

iv. A heart that DELIGHTS in the law of the Lord

1. THIS is why we sing of God's AMAZING grace

a. When we finally begin to realize how utterly undeserving we are of salvation, then God's GRACE will begin to TRULY be magnified in our lives

v. Blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord so much that it consumes his thinking, both day and night

1. My friends, this is a wholly supernatural delight, made possible ONLY by the grace of our great God

a. Which leads us into our final point,

6. Blessedness Praised

a. Look with me in verse 3, as the Psalmist describes the incredible life of the blessed man...

i. *"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."*

1. We talked a few weeks ago about this same concept in Jeremiah, didn't we?

a. We looked at how this tree planted by the streams of water doesn't fear when the heat comes, nor does it become anxious in seasons of drought

b. For the tree doesn't get its nourishment from its surrounding circumstances

i. It gets its nourishment from THE STREAM

ii. And that stream is the stream of LIVING WATER, water that is ONLY found in Jesus Christ

ii. Those who drink from this stream cannot help but to yield fruit in season

1. For in Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells within them

a. And the Spirit WILL bear forth his fruit in EVERYONE he dwells within!

iii. The blessed man yields fruit in season, his leaves will not wither in the heat, and in all that he does, he prospers

1. Sadly, in our church culture in which we live today, we have to stop and make a disclaimer here, don't we?

a. The Psalmist is not saying that this man will live a life of never-ending prosperity, in the sense that he will never be sick, he will never be broke, and he will always walk in the favor of man

i. That is a false gospel that we have created to excuse our own greed

b. Remember, we've already talked about Jesus' own words when he said "Blessed are you who are reviled and persecuted and falsely accused on my behalf... Blessed are you when you are persecuted for righteousness' sake..."

i. No, the promise of the Gospel is NOT "follow Jesus and he'll give you health, wealth, and prosperity"

ii. The promise of the Gospel is "follow Jesus and your witness in this world will be unstoppable – for he has been given all authority in earth and in heaven, and HE IS WITH US, to the very end of the age!"

c. For those of you that were there on Wednesday night this past week, we saw that in Paul's letter to the Philippians, didn't we?

i. We saw that, even though Paul was NOT in prosperous conditions, as he was chained to Roman guards 24-7 under house arrest, he still prospered in everything he did, didn't he?

1. For by his own account, by the time he wrote the letter to the Philippians, the entire Praetorian Guard – possibly upwards of 4000-5000 soldiers, knew that he was imprisoned in the name of Jesus Christ

iv. This is what it means to prosper in everything you do

1. This is what it means to bear fruit in season

2. This is what it means to say that our leaves will never wither

b. And finally, in verse 6, we get this wonderfully sweet promise:

- i. The Lord KNOWS the way of the righteous
  - 1. He KNOWS your delight in his law, even as you grieve that it cannot be more than it is
  - 2. He KNOWS your faith in His Son, even as you lament that you don't always love him as he deserves
  - 3. He KNOWS your desire to walk the narrow path of righteousness, even though the old man of your flesh is constantly trying to pull you back to the broad path of destruction
- ii. The Lord KNOWS your heart
  - 1. For He is the One who put it inside of you
    - a. And this is meant give us great assurance in our pilgrimage here on this earth
    - b. For there will be MANY days when we simply do not FEEL like delighting in the law of the Lord
      - i. But the Lord KNOWS our way
        - 1. He KNOWS our weaknesses
        - 2. He KNOWS our continual need for His grace
          - a. And therefore, the Son stands as Mediator on our behalf
          - b. The Spirit intercedes for us in our weakness
          - c. And the Father graciously provides for us everything we need for life and godliness
- iii. The Lord KNOWS the way of the righteous
  - 1. For, by His mercy, it is the way HE has led us to
  - 2. May those who have been called faithfully tread this path to glory
    - a. May we delight in the law of the Lord
    - b. And may we zealously urge others to flee from the road that is full of the quick sands that lead to perdition
      - i. This is the message of this first of the sacred hymns of the Scriptures
      - ii. Watson was spot-on, wasn't he?
        - 1. Psalm 1 truly is the "quintessence" of the Christian faith!