

## EXPERIENCING THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE (Volume 1)

### Session 2 - Psalm 1

#### ***Introductory Remarks:***

- This Psalm is most frequently classified as a "Wisdom Psalm." Such psalms are classified this way because they often exhibit words, concepts and teachings that are common to the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs).
- It is not hard to see the connection between Psalm 1 and some of the central themes of Scripture. We will be looking at some of the connections found between this psalm and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as found in Matthew 5-7.
- What we are looking at in Psalm 1 is the foundational commitment necessary for us to experience the fullness of God's presence as we move through the Psalms (and actually through the whole Bible). This single-minded faith is seen throughout God's Word and is foundational to understanding what it means to know and experience God in our lives. This commitment is something that needs to be both a settled issue in our hearts and minds, but it also is something that we will be learning about for the rest of our lives.

#### ***Psalm 1: An Introduction to the Entire Book of Psalms***

- Psalms 1 and 2 are consistently seen as providing the introduction to the whole Book of Psalms. There is good reason for this conclusion.
- Psalms 1 and 2 stand out as not having a superscription at the beginning. All of the other psalms in Book 1 (Psalms 1-41) are attributed to David (except Ps. 10 and 33). These two psalms stand out in that regard.
- The "Blessed" in the first verse of Psalm 1 and the last verse of Psalm 2 represent a literary device known as an inclusion. If this is meant to be an inclusion then everything that is said in between the two verses has to do with what type of person God's blessing rests upon. This is not hard to see as one reads through these two psalms. (See also Matthew 5:3-12 - Beatitudes)
- The two "ways" of Psalm 1 are taken up in a very vivid form in Psalm 2. The contrast of the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous in Psalm 1 leads into the warning in 2:11-12 that those who turn against God and his appointed King will "perish in the way" (1:6, 2:12).
- We also see a contrast of two different types of "meditating" in the two psalms. In Psalm 1 we see the meditating of the righteous which focuses on God and his instruction for their lives (1:2). In Psalm 2 we see the same word used in verse 1 of the peoples "plotting" or "conspiring" against the Lord. Together they make a powerful

point about the importance of what we allow our minds to focus upon and what we repeat to ourselves as we go about our daily activities.

- We don't want to miss the drastic difference represented in these two psalms as to the attitude of God toward the righteous and the wicked. The commitments of the two are radically different. The "fruit" that issues forth from their lives is radically different. And the response of God to both is radically different. God "knows" the way of the righteous. The way of the wicked will perish. Unless the wicked come to "delight" in God's instruction, "serve" and "rejoice" in him with proper fear (even trembling), and "kiss" the Son, they will not be among those who are under God's "blessing." (But more on that in Psalm 2)
- It is not hard to see the major themes that will be played out in the remainder of the Psalms as being introduced in the first two psalms. Psalm 1 emphasizes the two ways that mark the difference between those who are in the covenant community and those who are outside. It also shows the difference between God's attitude toward those who have faith in him (righteous) and those who don't (wicked). Psalm 2 clearly show these two ways as representing distinctly different responses to God and his appointed King. These distinctions pave the way for the struggles of the righteous in so many of the psalms as well as the celebrations of God and his blessing. And we dare not forget the centrality of God's revelation of himself and his will in his Word. This is picked up in many places, but nowhere more emphatically than in Psalms 19 and 119. (It is no accident that the longest chapter in the Bible is a celebration of God's Word - Psalm 119)

### ***"Blessed is the man" (1:1)***

- "Blessed" - Here is a word that, along with "bless" and "blessing" is frequently thrown around in Christian circles, but not often discussed. The tendency is to think of blessing as being the good things God gives us in our present lives. This is not totally wrong. Blessing is used of such things. However, it is a much deeper concept than this. If our concept of blessing stops, or even is primarily centered on such things, it will inevitably miss the mark and distort an important biblical concept.
- It is interesting to see biblical commentators try to define this word. The word "happy" is frequently used, but there is always a sense that it is inadequate. While such a concept as happiness can be seen in the word, we know that the most prominent ideas of what happiness is are woefully deficient to describe what it means to be blessed. However, Christians should also realize that there is a much more substantive form of happiness that God's people can experience partially in this life and without reservation

in the eternal state. Even so, it is very hard to move into the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:4 and translate it as "Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Most definitions of happy would exclude mourning (but not "comfort"). You get the point.

- So commentators try to find words that will fit the concept of "blessed." Perhaps the best ideas are those that center on God's favor or approval. To be blessed is to be the recipient of God's favor. It is to know God's approval and all that goes along with it. This fits more with the types of blessing that are described in places such as Psalms 1 and 2, as well as Matthew 5:3-12. The blessed are those who know the strength, nourishment, fruitfulness, and security of God "knowing" their way (Psalm 1). The blessed are those who have God as their "refuge" (Psalm 2). The blessed are those who are citizens of God's kingdom, who shall be comforted by God, who shall inherit the earth, who are filled with righteousness, who receive mercy, who see God, who are called sons of God, and who can rejoice and be glad when persecuted for Christ (Matthew 5:3-12). This gives us a much more realistic look at what it means to be blessed. It is to be constantly under the blessing of God. It is not simply the momentary experiences of temporal happiness that we may encounter. The types of blessings we read about in these two psalms and the Beatitudes are always on the righteous.

***"...who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers..." (1:1)***

- "...walks...stands...sits..." - While many commentators conclude that there is no intended progression in these terms, this is hard to accept from the text. The movement from walking to standing to sitting is clearly a progression that takes place even though there is some overlap in their overall emphasis. How we "walk" is how we live our lives. The believer is not to live according to the devotion and lifestyle of the ungodly. While this is certainly paralleled in the words "stands" and "sits," there is a progression in the thought that ends up with a seemingly final and comfortable position in the community of the wicked/sinners/scoffers.
- "...counsel...way...seat..." - The warning is here represented by whom we take as our counselors, the whole approach to life that we commit ourselves to (see "walks" above), and taking a permanent position in the assembly of the "scoffers."
- "...wicked...sinners...scoffers..." - While it is true that the words for "wicked" and "sinners" are frequently used interchangeably, the term "scoffers" represents the type

of person who has taken an active opposition to God and his people. We will see all three of these words used in Psalms to represent the unrighteous as well as constant descriptions of their activities in opposition to God. In Psalm 2 we see the "scoffers" clearly illustrated. (Proverbs presents the scoffer as one who never listens to God's wise instruction and who seemingly never will. He is fixed in his opposition to God and his wisdom.)

- True believers are to have nothing at all to do with the commitments or the sinful lifestyles of the wicked/sinners/mockers. Instead they are to be thoroughly saturated with God's law (his instruction).
- "It is important to note that what Psalm 1 cautions against is adopting the *attitude* and *lifestyle* of the wicked, not some casual contact with them or especially not the kind of redemptive association that Jesus modeled. The warning is against taking the "way" or path of the wicked, standing with them, and ultimately taking up residence in their territory. The kind of association with unbelievers Jesus models is an essential part of our redemptive role as bearers of good news and witnesses to the transforming power of Jesus Christ in our own lives." (Gerald Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, NIVAC)

***"...but his delight is in the law of the Lord..." (1:2)***

- "delight" - The attitude we should have toward the Word of God is one that flows from a proper attitude toward God himself. As Psalm 37:4 says it, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." The one who is truly blessed is the one who delights in God and, therefore, cannot do anything else but delight in what he reveals about himself and his will for our lives. When we look at the attitude exhibited toward God and his Word in Psalms 19 and 119, we get a taste of what this means. Read those two psalms. "Meditate" on them. Seek that attitude toward God's Word.
- "the law of the Lord" - The word for law (torah) can be used for any type of instruction (primarily from God), God's commandments, the five books of the Law (Pentateuch), or even of the Scriptures as a whole. It is important to try and see what God intended for his people to understand when the word is used in various contexts. In contexts like this it almost certainly includes the foundational teaching of the first five Books of the Bible (Pentateuch). These five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) functioned as the foundation of God's revealed will for them and continued to be further explained and expanded through the prophets and even these Psalms. Delight in

the law did not end with the Pentateuch, it just found its core foundations there. The delight in and meditation on the law mentioned here certainly includes this collection of psalms that Psalm 1 introduces. In fact, such an attitude is appropriate and necessary as a response to all of God's revelation of himself and his will throughout the entire Bible. This response is not called for simply because of the nature of "law," itself, but because this law comes from God himself.

***"...and on his law he meditates day and night..." (1:2)***

- "meditates" - The idea behind the word includes murmuring or muttering to oneself. It focuses on taking God's Word and actively considering its meaning and how it should be lived out in one's life. This is a central aspect of what we see in the Psalms. They are powerful examples of the activity and results of meditating on God's Word. The truths about God and his will for our lives are wrestled with and applied to our real life situations, feelings, and experiences (i.e. Psalms 42-43 as an example of meditating on God's truth in a horribly difficult situation and Psalm 73 as an example of one who is not meditating on God's truth at the beginning, but is reminded of it during worship and it radically changes his whole perspective.)
- "day and night" - These two terms are combined to mean "constantly." We are to be constantly seeking to understand and apply God's instruction to our lives.
- Meditation is one of the primary missing elements in our attempts to live out God's will in this world. We are to be constantly interacting with God's truth as we live our lives. Nothing is exempt from his guidance and instruction. Every aspect of our lives is to be seen as an outworking of our faith in Jesus Christ. This requires what Psalm 1:2 calls meditation. Far too often we rely too heavily on someone else to tell us how to apply God's truth. While it is important for teachers to give examples of how to apply the truth, application is primarily our responsibility as individuals and as the properly functioning Body of Christ. We should be constantly (day and night) considering how God's truth applies to our individual lives and also "exhorting one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13).

***"He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither." (1:3)***

- "like a tree" - This is a common image used to speak of our true spiritual condition. In this case the tree is one that is intentionally planted next to life-giving streams of water. Since it is able to get all the nourishment it needs, it grows to be a healthy tree that consistently yields fruit when it is supposed to. And it sustains that fruitfulness year after year. (See similar uses of the tree metaphor in Jeremiah 17:5-10 and Matthew 7:15-20)
- God's blessing throughout the Bible has to do with his provision for our lives both here and for eternity. He provides the nourishment, strength, fruitfulness (character & conduct), and security that we need. Look for these things as we move through the Psalms. Notice how the psalmist trusts in God as the provider while at the same time seeking for God to allow him to experience these things in his present situation. It is one who longs to experience the fullness of God's presence here and now even though there is the understanding that it will only come in all its fullness in eternity (see Psalm 73).

***"In all that he does, he prospers." (1:3)***

- "he prospers" - Like the well-watered tree, the person who delights in and meditates on God's Word is fruitful and, as this part of verse 3 emphasizes, is successful. The word prospers often carries with it the idea that this person will always be wealthy. That's not the idea here. The Old Testament often uses temporal blessings as pictures of the ultimate spiritual and eternal blessings God's people receive. This doesn't mean that godly living will not be blessed in this life. That is what a lot of the psalmists are praying for in the Psalms. They want to experience such blessings of God here and now. They are expressing what Psalm 27:13 declares: "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." But they also know how important it is to trust God as they wait: "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord" (Psalm 27:14). Our ultimate success is found in eternity. It is the perfection of our salvation, our glorification, that is our ultimate destiny. What a joy to know that our God gives us many tastes of such blessing in the land of the living!

***"The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away." (1:4)***

- "Not so the wicked!" - The language at the beginning of verse 5 emphasizes the strong contrast that is being made. What is true of the blessedness of the one who delights in and meditates on God's law is definitely not true of those who don't. This is why it is so important for the righteous to refuse to live according to the ways of the wicked/sinners/scoffers (1:1).
- "like chaff" - While the righteous are blessed with strength, fruitfulness and security, the wicked are devoid of all these blessings. The image used here to drive home this point is that of the threshing floor. Once the wheat had been harvested, it would be taken to a higher breezy location to separate the worthless husks (chaff) from the grain itself. To accomplish this, the wheat was crushed with a threshing sledge and then repeatedly tossed into the air. The wind would then blow the chaff away and the heavier grain would fall to the ground. The contrast between the flourishing tree and these light and worthless husks is striking. The Psalms frequently encourage us to keep such images in mind when we consider how to respond to the difficulties of this life.
- We have to take these vivid contrasts seriously if we want to truly love and glorify our Lord in this life. As we meditate on Psalm 1, we must think of the difference between the blessing that is on the godly as being like the well-nourished tree. And we must remember, no matter what appears to be the truth at the moment, that unbelievers are really like chaff that the wind easily blows away. For a lesson in the importance of this perspective, look at Psalm 73.

***"Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment..." (1:5)***

- "Therefore..." - The psalm is reaching its climax in these verses. Because of the spiritual reality of the godly and the wicked that we have just seen, this is the ultimate reality for both. This is where both paths/ways are leading.
- "...not stand in the judgment" - The ultimate reality of God's judgment is frequently used in Scripture to help us keep the right perspective on life (i.e. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:11). Why? Because the final judgment reveals what is ultimately true and worthwhile. Focusing on the Day of Judgment makes us consider ultimate realities so that we can respond properly to present realities. The ultimate reality for those who do have faith in God is that they will not stand in

judgment. This can have consequences in present judgments that God makes on the wicked, but finds its ultimate expression in the final Day, the final judgment (see the present expression of God's wrath in Romans 1:18-32 and the future full expression of God's wrath in Romans 2:4-5).

***"...nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous..." (1:5)***

- "...the congregation of the righteous" - The wicked are also removed from the blessing of being a part of the people of God and all the blessing that goes along with that privilege. That is true now, but is ultimately true for all eternity. Those who have a relationship with God through faith enjoy the presence of God now and throughout all eternity. The wicked will never experience such joy (Psalm 16:11) unless they repent (Psalm 2).
- We should never take lightly the blessing that we have to be a part of God's people, the Body of Christ. Through Jesus Christ we are given the amazing gift of dwelling among "the congregation of the righteous." While the Body of Christ is far from perfect, we have a true family to live out this life with and to celebrate with for all eternity. Professing Christians who separate themselves from the church are in a precarious and dangerous position. To be a Christian is to be a part of this family. And God has designed it so that we only grow to full maturity in Christ as a part of a local congregation of believers (Ephesians 4:11-16). A big part of the judgment of God on unbelievers is to be alienated from the blessing of being a part of the people of God. Do we see the church in that light? Even with all of the problems that we encounter because of the imperfection of the church at this time, do we see her as precious? Do we love her with the love of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-32)?

***"...for the Lord knows the way of the righteous..." (1:6)***

- "for" - Why is these things true? Why will judgment be like this for the ungodly? Why will they not have the privilege of being a part of the assembly of the righteous? It's because the Lord "knows" the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Their chosen courses of life lead to distinctly different eternal realities.
- "the Lord knows" - This may be one of the more comforting statements in all of the Bible. God knows the righteous. While he knows everything about the ungodly, he does



not have an intimate relationship with them. He does, however, have an intimate relationship with his people. He dwells with his people and they are the ones who have his blessing on their lives. The greatest blessing, of course, is God himself. To know him is our greatest treasure. That's why it is such a comforting statement when it says "the Lord knows the way of the righteous." The Lord is always with his people. Nothing we go through is without him. He loves, cares for, protects, leads, nourishes, empowers, corrects, transforms, and keeps us. We will see the outworking of this quickly stated truth as we move through the Psalms (i.e. Psalm 23). In fact, it is everywhere in Scripture. The Lord knowing our way, knowing us, changes everything. (See Matthew 7:21-23 for how important it is for the Lord to have this personal knowledge of his people - to have a real relationship with us).

***"...but the way of the wicked will perish." (1:6)***

- "the way of the wicked" - The way of the righteous and the way of the wicked represent two very different commitments and ways of living. In Matthew 7:13-27 we see these two ways contrasted by Jesus. There are always just these two ways. In the Book of Proverbs it is the way of the wise/righteous over against the way of the fool/unrighteous. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says there are just two gates/ways that people can choose. There is a narrow gate that leads to a hard way that few find. And there is a wide gate with an easy way that is heavily populated. The narrow gate leads to life while the broad gate leads to destruction. The way of the wicked will perish. But the good news is that God has provided entrance at the narrow gate for all who believe. The narrowness does not have to do with access, it has to do with the one way to be made right with God, through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16-17; Acts 4:12).