

The Foundation of Worship

Psalm 1

Proposition: The way of the righteous is everlasting communion with God in his Word, so right worship requires a rejection of wickedness and a drawing near to God.

Say Hello

Intro

As we begin our Summer in the Psalms, I find it necessary to introduce the Psalms as a whole and provide some background information that will be helpful for us as we are ministered to by them. First and foremost we must recognize that the Psalms are a collection of poems written by the Hebrew people a long time ago. In fact, they make up the largest collection of poetry in Scripture. So, in order to understand the Psalms, we need to have a basic understanding of biblical poetry, and to help us do that, here is a short video.

Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9yp1ZXbsEg>
0-3:48

So, as we dig into the Psalms this summer, our goal is not to take every word literally. In fact, if we did this, we would be missing the point that God is making and disrespecting his perfect words. Our goal is to see, feel, and experience the word picture that God is painting through the Psalmists and allow that picture to change our hearts, our minds, and our actions.

Second, we must understand that the book of Psalms was designed for worship. It was the hymnal of the people of

Israel and even the early church. The book was and is a place for the people of God to step into the presence of God and praise him for what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will do. In order to lean into that reality this summer, we will be exploring the theme “Right Worship in a Wrong World.” We will seek to discover what the selected Psalms teach about God, the people of God, humanity in general, and the world we live in. Then we will see how this changes the way that we are to worship our awesome God in an undeniably not-awesome world. So, lets jump in starting with Psalm 1.

In the Old Testament, some of the Levites were assigned to be gatekeepers at the tabernacle and later the temple. They were to stand at the gate and make sure that the holy presence of God was not entered into lightly, apathetically, or incorrectly. One did not have to be perfect to enter the temple, but the space was not to be desecrated by the wicked person whose way was committed to wickedness.

In the same way, Psalm 1 stands as a gatekeeper to the sanctuary of the book of Psalms. It demands that the reader stop and examine themselves before taking the next step into worship. It presents two ways of life, teaches which is better, and implicitly asks the hearers which one they are committed to. In the same way, we will examine what this poem says about the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked, seek to understand the Psalmist’s conclusion about these ways, then apply that our own lives and worship. In doing so I believe that we will find that

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Before we look into the two ways of life in this Psalm, I want to ask to the question that we will end with, the question that I believe we must answer to understand the Psalm. Verse 6 starts with a “For,” which indicates a reason or a summary of the previous information, which is verses 1-5, and it says, “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” The Psalmist could have said “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked he does not know.” Or, “For the way of the righteous will live, but the way of the wicked will perish.” But he didn’t. To sum up Psalm 1, he contrasts the fact that the way, the life, the being of the righteous is known by the Lord, but that of the wicked will perish. Think on that for a while and we’ll come back to it, but now let’s see what this text says about the two ways.

1. The Way of the Righteous (v. 1-3)

The first three verses tell us about the righteous person and his life. (Read v.1) All 4 of these lines are expanding on the same idea and show a kind of escalation in association. The first idea seems minor. Walking with someone doesn’t necessarily mean you agree with them. Rather, you are just willing to hear them out and consider their perspective. Second is standing. This is not a passing consideration of the way of sinners, but a deliberate siding with it. The righteous man will not consider the way of the wicked, and he certainly won’t attach himself to it. Last is sitting or dwelling. And, not just sitting with the sinner, but with the scoffer. The one who mocks God and his instruction. Who says, “Who needs a god?” or “I’m my own God.” This line indicates a loyalty with evil that is long-lasting and settled.

Let us not be foolish or ignorant and think that these things are separate. They are not. They blur together. They are dominos in a row. When we chose to walk in the counsel of the wicked, we often find ourselves sitting in the seat of the scoffers. When we walk in the counsel of the selfish, proud, morally bankrupt culture, we will find ourselves acting in selfish, proud, immoral ways. When we listen to those telling us to live our truth, do what feels good, and live for ourselves, we will find ourselves doing just that. The righteous person knows this and makes a different choice. (Read v. 2)

The law of the Lord here is not necessarily 613 laws laid out in Exodus and Leviticus. Rather, it is the instruction of the God for his people. This is what the righteous person chooses, but read the text again. He doesn’t simply take it in. He doesn’t simply know it. He *delights* in it. This isn’t broccoli to him, it’s a cheeseburger and fries. He loves God’s teaching in such a way that he can’t stop meditating on it. It’s in his mind and on his heart. It controls his thoughts and he just can’t get it out of his head. Day and night he is enthralled by what God has said and what the Lord is teaching him.

Now, I don’t know about you, and this broke my heart this week, but those last sentences often describe my relationship with sin better than my relationship with the Word of God. It’s in my mind and on my heart. It controls my thoughts and I can’t get it out of my head. And sometimes, I love it. I love building my own kingdom and acting for my own purposes and satisfying my flesh. And in these times, I sprint through the lines of verse 1. I surround myself with the voices and influences that tell me to keep going and keep building and keep sinning. I don’t open my heart to the influence of the Lord’s instruction because I know what he thinks and I want nothing to do with it.

But not the righteous person. He runs after God in the instruction of the Lord. He soaks in the Word until people who encounter him get more of the Word than the person. Day and night he sets his heart on the law of the Lord, and in doing so he never even comes close to rubbing shoulders with the counsel of the wicked. He surrounds himself with one voice and one opinion concerns him: the Lord. As I considered this through the week, I was forced to make this conclusion: I am not the righteous man. I really want to be, and I try to convince myself that I am, but I am not. It was a hard pill to swallow, but it was one that I desperately needed to take, because I was missing what God had for me by automatically reading my name into the place of the righteous man.

So, friends, stop and think and pray. Be honest with yourself. Does the description of the righteous person so far in Psalm 1 always describe you? Does it sometimes describe you? Does it ever describe you? Remember this poem's role as the gatekeeper to the book. It is begging you to examine yourself closely. Please do.

The Psalmist wraps up his description of the righteous man with an analogy. He is like a tree planted by streams of water. Now, I don't know how familiar you are with the climate of Israel, but it is mostly a desert. It's hot and dry and windy and, for the most part, desolate. That means that there are two things you don't see very often: streams of water, and trees. Therefore, a tree planted by streams of water was the gold standard in vegetation. It did not get any better than that. But that's not all. This tree also bears fruit every single season without fail, and it never ever shows signs of withering. This tree has everything it needs and, as long as things stay as they are, it will never die. This is the righteous man. Simply put, in

all that he does he prospers. Oh the sweetness of being like the righteous man. May it always appear this beautiful to us.

2. The Way of the Wicked

The description of the wicked man is brief yet powerful. The wicked are not so. Look back at verses 1-3. None of this applies to the wicked. He aimlessly takes council from the wicked and let's himself be conformed into the image of the godless. He has no taste for truth; he takes no pleasure in the things of God. He has no time to be taught by the only true teacher because he is busy dabbling in every variety of sin. And what does the Psalmist compare him to? Chaff that the wind drives away. In the ancient process of acquiring grain for making bread, the chaff stood in the way. It was utterly useless, and when the wind carried it away from the desirable grain, it was immediately forgotten. If the tree planted by streams had an opposite, it would be chaff. The tree is rare while the chaff is common. The tree has many uses while the chaff is perfectly useless. The tree is steadfast while the chaff is gone with the breeze. Ultimately, where the tree has abundant life, the chaff has none at all.

Friends, this leaves us in a very bad place. Psalm 1 only conceives of 2 kinds of people, the righteous and the wicked, and I believe that the first half excludes us from being the righteous. So we are the wicked. We are the chaff. And look what verse 5 says about us. (Read 5). Where the righteous man prospers at the hand of God, we fall at his judgement. And look at the second line of the verse. The congregation of the righteous is the primary location of worship in the Old Testament. In effect this verse in saying that the wicked are disqualified from worship. They are cut off. When the wind blows, the chaff is revealed for what it really is. Chaff.

But wait. This is not the end. Remember our original question? Why are being known by the Lord and dying

opposites in verse 6? Here's why: it is because **real, true, enduring life is being known by God** in the relational kind of knowing. Look at the life of the righteous man. It is totally characterized by communion with God. The essence of his life is his relationship with the Lord, and this relationship causes a distancing from the evils of the world. And the Psalmist calls this being known by God instead of knowing God. Why? because every relationship between God and man is initiated and sustained by God. This is constant through Scripture and it will never change. The real life is communion with God, and Communion with God is founded on God's choice to know us.

So now the question becomes how do we come to be known in this way by God? I hope that all of our hearts are crying out, "God, by myself I'm chaff, and I don't want to be chaff. I want to be the blessed man. I want to be the tree. I want to bear fruit. I want to LIVE! What is the way of the righteous?" Allow me to reframe the question and ask, "Who is the way of the righteous?"

In all the Bible and in all of history there was one man who was not chaff. He delighted in and meditated on the instruction of the Lord. He did not walk, stand, or sit amongst the wicked. He had laser focus on the call of God on his life and never strayed from it once, delighting in it and meditating on it day and night. But he wasn't just the righteous man. He was much more, which is why he said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father but by me." In other words, do you want to be righteous? I am the Way. Do you want to delight in and desire the truth of God's instruction? I am the truth. Do you want have the life of a tree planted by streams of water? I am the Life, and communion with God, the foundation of the way of the righteous, is impossible apart from me.

This man's name is Jesus Christ, and whether you've known him for 50 years or you have no idea who he is, he is looking deeply into your soul through Psalm 1 and saying, "By yourself you are chaff, But you don't have to be chaff anymore! Come to me! Surrender yourself to me and you will have everything you need. I am the tree and I am the stream of water, and when you come to me I you are able to stop living the life of chaff and start living the beautiful life of the tree. Don't perish, come and be known by the Lord. Come bear fruit. Come and live."

And so, the gatekeeper of the Psalms throws each one of us at the feet of Jesus, the way of the righteous. Those who choose another way do not and cannot worship. Therefore, today and tomorrow and every day for the rest of the summer and every day for the rest of your time on earth, reject the life of chaff, being tossed around and blown away, and choose Christ the eternal tree. Delight in and meditate on the Word of God, where you will have the greatest joy of knowing the one who has gone to the greatest length to know you for your good and his own glory. Relationship with God in Christ will drive you to the Word, and the Word will drive you to Christ. No matter the circumstance or situations of your life, no matter of you are rich or poor, healthy or sick, your soul will prosper in having an abundance of true life. The way of the wicked will grow less and less satisfying until it ends in death, but the way of the righteous, Christ himself, will grow more and more satisfying for all eternity.

For me to live is Christ to die is gain