

**"Two Men, Two Ways, Two Destinies"
Psalm 1**

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Today we are beginning a new series of Sunday morning messages on the Psalms. One of the early church fathers, St. Basil, wrote that "they are like a general hospital for souls where we might each select the medicine for our own disease." Martin Luther found them inexpressibly precious in the trials and conflicts of his stormy soul. John Calvin said, "no one will find in himself a single feeling of which the image is not reflected in the mirror of the Psalms."

Just as the Temple was in the physical center of the people of God in the Old Testament, the book of Psalms is right in the center of the Bible. They have been appropriately called "the hymn book of the Old Testament" because all 150 Psalms were at one time put to music and sung in public and private worship.

The center chapter of the Bible is Psalm 119. Every verse of this chapter says something about the value of God's Word. For instance, Psalm 119:18: "*Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.*" My prayer is that as we study the Psalms over the next few weeks, the Lord will indeed open our eyes to see wonderful things in His law, so that we will be able to respond to His Word in true worship and live lives that bring Him glory.

Jewish tradition tells us that the first two Psalms were originally one. To me that seems very appropriate; because these two Psalms definitely go together as an introduction to the whole book of Psalms. They deal with the two most important issues of life. The first Psalm deals with the blessedness of loving and obeying God's Law. The second Psalm deals with the blessedness of loving and submitting to God's Son, the Messiah.

The first Psalm has been called the gateway to the Psalms. It talks about two men, two ways, and two destinies. So let's turn now to the first Psalm. And read it together:

¹Blessed is the man who does not walk
in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.

²But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

³He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.

⁴Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

The two men of Psalm 1 are placed in sharp contrast.

- One man is OBEDIENT to God's Word; and the other is DISOBEDIENT.
- One lives a God-centered life. The other lives a self-centered life.
- One is following God through obedience to His Word and receiving His blessings; the other is rejecting God and His Word and is facing His judgment.

The contrast is vividly seen by bringing together the first and the last words of this Psalm – blessed and perish. Blessed means "happy" – to be on a road that leads to ultimate joy. Perish means to be "lost" – to be on a road that leads nowhere and to ultimate ruin.

THE MAN WHO IS OBEDIENT TO GOD'S LAW

1. He has a crowd-resistant mentality

¹Blessed is the man who does not walk
in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.

He doesn't listen to what the crowd says. He doesn't go where the crowd goes. He doesn't do what the crowd does. He doesn't live by the motto: "everybody else is doing it." He rejects the thinking and the values and the lifestyle of those who have left God out of their lives.

Consider the meaning of the three terms found in verse 1:

WICKED: The term “wicked” does not mean what we might think it means – murderers, rapists, drug pushers, gangsters. It simply means “ungodly.” The ungodly person is a man or woman, boy or girl who is not living in obedience to the Law of God - the absolute standards God has given us in the Bible. He/she does whatever they think will work best for them.

- If cheating will make the difference between passing or failing, then he will cheat because for the moment that will work for him.
- If stealing makes life easier or better, then he thinks it is OK to steal.
- If lying to a friend will avoid embarrassment or avoid an argument then he will tell a lie.

He may be a nice, likeable guy. She may be a pretty and popular girl. But they are both wicked. Why? Because what they believe and how they behave are not really based on God’s Holy Word. They do not have a clear philosophy about life that comes from the Bible and that influences their decisions and their lifestyle.

According to a recent Barna research poll, this characterizes 63% of our young people today. And sadly it describes many kids that grow up in Christian homes today. They go to church but in their daily lives they are ungodly.

SINNER: What you believe ultimately determines your values and your values drive your behavior. This leads us to the next word, “sinner” which means “to miss the mark.” Since this person’s values come from the world rather than the Word, he or she ends up missing the mark of God’s standards and disregards His Word.

MOCKER: A “mocker” is a person who goes even further. This is a person whose not only disobeys God, but he has come to the point where he is openly antagonistic and opposed to God (whom he claims does not exist). He laughs at everything that is holy and sacred. He ridicules people who believe in God. He doesn’t want the Bible read in the public schools, or anywhere else for that matter.

Our society is more and more filled with “mockers.” They are often the elite, influential people of our nation, who are hostile toward God and His Son Jesus Christ. They hate and oppose those who stand up for biblical morality. Many of them dress in the robes of justice, but mock righteousness and true justice and bring reproach upon our nation. Others dress in religious robes, but publicly ridicule the Bible and the standards of God’s Word.

2. He has a one-track mind.

The man who is obedient to God's Word not only has a crowd-resistant mentality, he has a one-track mind. "*His **delight** is in the law of the LORD and in His law he **meditates** day and night.*" This means that instead of thinking and living like the world around him, he lets the Word of God shape his thinking and transform his life. He is living a God-centered life, rather than a self-centered life.

3. He is like a strong and beautiful tree.

³He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.

The roots of his life are deep into the principles and truths of the Law of God. Like a towering oak tree on a river bank, he endures and flourishes no matter what the circumstances of life may bring, because his strength is in a source outside of himself.

THE MAN WHO IS DISOBEDIENT TO GOD'S LAW

This is the ungodly man, who lives a self-centered life rather than a God-centered life – who thinks he can work out his life, independently of God's absolute standards of right and wrong.

The Holy Spirit uses a graphic expression to describe the ungodly in verse 4: "*Not so the wicked, **they are like chaff** that the wind blows away...*" A total contrast from a strong and beautiful tree of verse 3.

As a boy I grew up on my grandfather's farm in central Illinois. I can recall walking along the wheat fields around harvest time and breaking off a few ears of wheat (I have a couple of ears of wheat right here in my pocket). I would rub the wheat in my hands to separate the chaff (illustrate), then I would blow away the chaff (blow the chaff away) and pop the wheat in my mouth. The only thing you can do with chaff is blow it away. It has no value. It is utterly and completely worthless.

That is God's evaluation of a life that has no room for Him. It is like chaff.

That man may be impressive in the eyes of the world. He may have a beautiful home. He may drive a nice car. He may receive the applause of

the world. He may be one of the rich and the famous in the world. She may be a beautiful girl with a promising future.

But in God's evaluation, his life and her life is just wasted time; it is worthless – like chaff that the wind drives away. Because they are not fulfilling the purpose for which God put them in this world (See Ray C. Stedman, Psalms of Faith, 20).

THE TOTAL ADEQUACY OF GOD'S WORD FOR LIVING A GODLY LIFE

In II Timothy 3:14-17, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the total adequacy of God's Word to enable us to empower us and guide us in living a godly life that pleases him and receives His blessing.

Notice five things Paul tells us here about the Bible (See, "The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling," Wayne A. Mack, The Master's Seminary Journal (Spring 1998) 63-84.

*¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the **holy** Scriptures, which are **able** to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is **God-breathed** and is **useful** for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be **thoroughly equipped for every good work**.*

1. It is holy. "from infancy you have known the **holy** Scriptures." The word holy means "set apart." It is set apart from any other writing. It is unique – "the Holy Bible." No other book can compare with the Bible.

2. It is powerful. "You have known the holy Scriptures, which are **able** to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." God's Word has the power to do things in your life. As Jay Adams has written, it is "the Holy Spirit's tool for working in the minds and hearts of men to make them like Christ." It is powerful and able to change your life.

3. It is God-breathed. The Bible is so powerful because its truths had their origin in God. The Bible is not merely some man's opinions or discoveries or insights. It is authoritative and sufficient because it had its origin in God.

4. It is useful or profitable. It is profitable in our lives in every way for time and eternity, in our relationship with God, our relationships with others, our marriages, our families, our goals, in our need for guidance and direction, and for our spiritual and emotional well-being.

Specifically it is useful for four things:

- (1) For teaching. It is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to provide us with a standard of what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, true and false.
- (2) For reproof. It is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to convict us of sin, and show us where we are wrong in our thinking, our feelings, our values and our actions and reactions. It brings us under conviction and motivates us to repent and change.
- (3) For correction. It is the instrument God uses to point us in the right direction and correct our sinful thoughts, motives, feelings and actions. It tells us how to change and what to change.
- (4) For training in righteousness. It is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to help us develop new patterns of life so that we living God's way. It helps us develop strength where we are weak.

5. It can thoroughly equip us for every good work. It prepares us to become what Josh McDowell's calls, "**twenty-first-century gladiators**" who can enter the arena of an antagonistic culture and not crumble under its pressure like so many are doing today. (See Josh McDowell, Beyond Belief to Convictions, 21).

THE DESTINY OF THOSE WHO REJECT GOD AND HIS WORD

Outwardly a man's life may be very impressive. But inwardly it may be nothing but a hollow shell, empty and worthless like chaff.

Why is this? The answer is in verse 6, "*The Lord knows or watches over the way of the righteous,*" (1:6). The Lord is watching over the godly man, guiding him, guarding him, and keeping him. "*But the way of the wicked [the ungodly] will perish,*" (1:6b). That means it will dribble out into nothing. "*His lamp will be put out in utter darkness,*" as Proverbs 20:20 says.

Ray Stedman has noted that this principle has never been demonstrated more strikingly than in the days of the New Testament:

"As we know from the book of Acts, there came a time when the Apostle Paul stood as a prisoner before Nero the Emperor of Rome. Nero was a arrogant, heartless, ruthless monster. He is regarded by historians as one of the most degraded and contemptible rulers ever to sit upon a throne. He once saw a handsome young man in his court and he ordered him castrated and used him as a woman the rest of his life. Yet his name was known all over the empire. He was Caesar. The whole of the Roman world bowed to his will. The life of that mighty empire revolved around this man, Nero.

Then there stood before him this obscure little Jew, Paul the Apostle, from a despised Roman province. No one knew him. He had scarcely been heard of except in a few isolated places where he had caused some trouble. He was a prisoner in chains, standing before this mighty emperor.

Yet, as it has been well pointed out, the amazing thing is that today we name our sons Paul, and our dogs, Nero."

"For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish"

Robert Frost, the great American poet wrote: "Two roads diverged in a wood and I took the one less traveled by – and that has made all the difference."

We can't be successful by listening to what the crowd says, going where the crowd goes, doing what the crowd does. Ultimate success in life is found in getting the roots of our lives deep into the truth of God's Word and letting it shape our thinking and transform our lives.

HOPE FOR LOST SINNERS

Is there hope for a person who has left God out of his life and is headed down a road that leads to ultimate emptiness and ruin?

Yes. The wonderful promise of God's Word in Romans 5:6-8 is this: *"At just the right time, when we were still **powerless**, Christ died for the **ungodly**. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still **sinner**s, Christ died for us."*

Believe His promise, turn from your wicked ways and trust Christ as your Savior today. He is in the business of saving and transforming the lives of ALL who come to him by faith! (Romans 6:23).

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