

Applying Psalm 1

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Introduction.

- A. In our study of the Scripture, and indeed in our walk with God, sometimes we have trouble with perspective. The Bible is the densest book that has ever been written. None of us will exhaust the possibilities for study that it offers, even if we spend our whole lives on it. Because this is so, it's easy sometimes to become trapped in the details and forget the point. We get so caught up in figuring out some complex argument in the book of Romans that we lose sight of why the book of Romans is important to us in the first place.
- B. Thankfully, God recognized this potential danger and took steps to guard against it thousands of years before we ever appeared on the scene. Some parts of the Bible are detailed, yes, because they have to be, but other parts do a wonderful job of pointing us back to the big picture. One such part is Psalm 1.
- C. In truth, it's almost an accident that I'm preaching on Psalm 1 this morning. I had meant to prepare a sermon on wisdom in Proverbs, but as I was looking for another passage, Psalm 1 caught my eye. I've never really given it the attention it deserves. It's short—only six verses—but it's beautifully written and full of meaning. In fact, if any of you are looking for a short section of Scripture to memorize, Psalm 1 would be a wonderful context to choose. However, the Psalm is equally useful for our purposes this morning because of the way that it defines our lives. Let's turn our attention now, then, not just to reading Psalm 1, but to applying it.

I. The Way of the Righteous.

- A. We see the entirety of the text in Psalm 1:1-6. As this division of the text indicates, we can neatly split the Psalm into two basic parts: the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. Let's take the first way first. In the very first verse of the Psalm, the author describes a man as "blessed," that is, as having received divine favor, because he has NOT done three things. Friends, it is every bit as important for us to avoid these three things today as it was 3000 years ago. Let's examine them in detail.
- B. The first of these three things that we are supposed to shun is walking in the counsel of the ungodly. This addresses where we turn for guidance. To whom do we listen? Is it to God and to the righteous, or is it to the wicked people around us who do not know the way of the Lord? Certainly, there is plenty of wicked counsel to go around. We hear it from the TV, from our co-workers, from our non-Christian friends, and even from our own families. It's counsel about the way that the world thinks things should naturally be done.
- C. I was very struck by this during our house closing. The closing itself was mercifully short; we were in and out in about an hour, but even in that hour, we learned quite a bit about the other people who were in that room. The sellers were selling the house because they'd gotten divorced and the bank was about to foreclose on them, and so naturally, divorce came up as a subject of conversation. It seemed like everybody in the room had gotten divorced except us. The sellers were getting divorced, the seller's attorney had gotten divorced, the seller's real estate agent had gotten divorced, and so on. Worse still was the mindset. It seemed like everybody in the room regarded divorce as a natural, inevitable part of life, and the only surprise came when you didn't get divorced. As Lauren and I were sitting there saying nothing, I was struck by how it was like they were reading from a different life script. They were reading from the counsel of the ungodly.
- D. Friends, we need to avoid walking in that counsel at all costs, and that means we have to learn to tune it out. The evil of modern America must not be the standard for our behavior. Just because the people around us say or do or encourage something doesn't mean it's OK. All it may mean is that if we follow them, we will end up just as lost as they are. If we share in the mind of the world, we will share in the fate of the world too.
- E. The same thing is true of standing in the path of sinners. This is the same thought that Jesus brings up in Matthew 7:13-14. Everybody is living their lives in one of two ways. Either they are on the path of the righteous, or they are on the path of sinners. The righteous may sin from time to time; the sinner may occasionally do good, but that does not change the essential nature or the destination of the path. We need to make sure that our feet are headed in the right direction. It's not a popular choice, but it's the only good one.
- F. Finally, we need to avoid sitting in the seat of the scornful. Unlike the first two, this one is a little harder to figure out. First of all, the seat of the scornful isn't just a chair. Instead, it is a literal or metaphorical place of judgment. Consider the way that the word "seat" is used in Acts 18:12-13. Also, scornful man isn't merely sarcastic; instead, he's someone who scorns God and His law. Thus, we sit in the seat of the scornful when we presume to pass judgment on spiritual things, when we act like we know more than God.
- G. This too is a common phenomenon in our society. The evolutionist and the atheist deny the creation account of Genesis, the child psychologist condemns the use of spanking as described in Proverbs, and the gay-rights advocate speaks against the condemnation of homosexuality in Romans. Friends, we must not take these positions for our own, nor even allow them to contaminate our thinking. When we do, when we elevate our wisdom and the wisdom of other men above God's wisdom, that's where we find ourselves in this seat.

- H. Once the psalmist describes what the righteous man does not do, he describes what the righteous man DOES do in Psalm 1:2. What's fascinating about this description is that it doesn't focus on a list of actions. Instead, it zeroes in on one trait: his delight in the law of the Lord and the way he thinks about it all the time.
- I. Friends, we need to learn a lesson from this. We need to learn where our righteousness also has to begin. We cannot be righteous people unless we delight in the law of the Lord, unless we truly love God's word. This is not a hard thing to figure out, because if we truly love it, we will spend time with it. Where does our time go? Do we spend more time with the Bible, or more time with our favorite TV shows? Do we spend more time talking with our kids about God, or do we spend more time taking them to baseball practice? Even innocent delights can become a spiritual problem if we put them before God.
- J. The problem is that the influence of God's word in our lives is like gas in a car. As we go around, interacting with the world, our store of spiritual strength inevitably starts running out, and we need to refuel by finding God through prayer and through His word. If we don't, Satan will take advantage of our weakness and begin to fill our lives with spiritual problems. If that's where we are, if we're struggling with some sin and just can't seem to get it out of our lives, it's most likely also a sign that we're fighting our spiritual battles with the gas tank on empty. Let's remember that, and when we need help, let's turn constantly to God's book.
- K. Once we do this, once we get back in touch with the Bible, we see what results we can expect in Psalm 1:3. We will be like a tree beside a stream. You know how in summer, all the little creeks and whatnot in the country tend to dry up? That's actually not because the water evaporates because it's hot. It's because the trees beside the creeks take in all the water themselves. We need to be that way. We need to be thirstily taking in all the Scripture we can get. If we do, we too will bear fruit and have leaves that do not wither.
- L. We see the kind of fruit we can expect to bear if we do this described in Galatians 5:22-23. Remember how the description of the righteous in Psalm 1:2 didn't mention any works? This is the reason why: because if we are truly planted by the word, these things will appear in our lives naturally. In the same way, our leaves will naturally not wither because we are nourished by the life that God provides. And then, our lives will be prosperous. This doesn't necessarily mean that we'll become wealthy, although the Scripture does have much to teach us about good stewardship. It does mean, though, that we'll become spiritually prosperous.

II. The Way of the Ungodly.

- A. So far so good, but what a contrast we see when we turn to Psalm 1:4. Concerning all those good things we just finished talking about, the psalmist flatly observes, "The ungodly are not so," and he compares them to chaff. Now, this is corn country up here, so you folks might not have seen chaff. You see, the way wheat is, you have little wheat kernels that are surrounded by a dry, grasslike, inedible substance. That's the chaff. If you're of a mind, and you're walking by a wheatfield, you can reach over, pluck a head of wheat, and rub it together in your palms. That knocks the chaff off, and then you can blow the chaff away and eat the wheat.
- B. That's what the wicked are like. They are a pointless thing that will soon vanish away. Isn't that the perfect description? Without God in our lives, that's all we are. We will live out our 70 or 80 years, doing whatever meaningless thing catches our fancy, and then we'll die, and everything we've done will be forgotten. Chaff. We need to ask ourselves what we want, a life of eternal purpose, or of eternal purposelessness.
- C. The psalmist next provides us with the reason why this is true in Psalm 1:5. When the time comes to judge the nations, on that day, everyone will stand or fall based on what they have done with their lives, and the ungodly won't be able to pass the test. All of those people who so proudly go their own way all around us, all those people who tell us, "I don't need God," on that day are going to find out differently. We see their reaction to an earthly judgment of God described in Revelation 6:15-17. How much more will this happen during the time of the final judgment? On that day, no one will be able to maintain pride against God.
- D. Similarly, the sinner won't be able to stand in the congregation of the righteous either. On earth, that's not the case. It is likely that in this congregation at this moment, there are some people who aren't right with God. I have my thoughts about who some of them might be, but I don't know, and it's entirely possible that some of you have me completely fooled. Know what? You can fool me, you can fool the elders, you can fool the whole congregation, but you can't fool God. On the day of judgment, a sinner is going to stand out to God like a steak in a vegetarian restaurant. There will be no confusion. There will be no mistakes. For the righteous, that's a very, very good thing, but for the wicked, it's very, very bad.
- E. We see the conclusion of this entire line of reasoning in Psalm 1:6. It's very simple. It's very cut-and-dried. The righteous are going to live. The wicked won't. God knows who are His. From before the foundation of the world, He purposed to send His Son to save them, and at this very moment, He knows exactly how many hairs are on each one of our heads. God actually cares about us more than we care about ourselves. Not so for the wicked. God wants all men to be saved, but if we don't take advantage of His offer of salvation, He's not going to rescue us from the consequences of our own stubbornness. Indeed, the justice of God demands that the wicked be punished. When judgment comes, the ungodly will have no chance. Only the righteous can hope to pass the test, and by the grace of God, pass into heaven with Him.

Conclusion. If you are not among the righteous but would like to be, repent today.