

TRUE HAPPINESS

Psalm 1

Intro: I have spoken from Psalm 1 several times before, and usually it has been at the beginning of a new year. One reason for this is that it is a Psalm which deals with happiness, and on new year's we hear the greeting over and over again, "Happy New Year." The Bible has a lot to say about happiness and joy, but it is quite different from the idea of happiness which you find in the world. We learned this morning in our SS lesson that there can be happiness in trials, not because we enjoy troubles, but because we know that God is doing good things in our lives when he leads us through experiences we would never choose if it were left up to us. We would like a trouble-free life, where every day was just exactly like we would prefer it to be, but life is not like that, and we do not have that kind of a choice to make about our lives. Those who know the Lord have the joy of realizing that our lives are in the Lord's hands, and that He is in control, although we are not.

If we were to take all that the Bible has to say about a happy life, we would have to gather up all of the beatitudes of Scripture, plus many other passages which deal with the subject of happiness. But for tonight, let me take you again to this familiar Psalm which, as most of you know, was a part of our SS memory work for the Fall months. And let us begin by quoting it, or reading it, together.

(Read, or quote.)

The Psalm really has three parts:

- 1) The godly man described in vv. 1-3.
- 2) The ungodly man described in vv. 4, 5.
- 3) The reason for the difference between the two, in v. 6.

Let us look first at the godly man.

I. THE RIGHTEOUS MAN (Psa. 1:1-3).

We should not overlook the fact that it is possible to be happy, truly happy, even in a world like we are living in. There is so much unhappiness, and so many things happening all of the time to make people unhappy, that many are inclined to feel that happiness at the best can only be a temporary experience—certainly nothing that is permanent. And they feel that way because they don't know the Lord, and they don't know the Word of God. But sometimes you find Christians who are inclined to feel pessimistic about happiness, and that is because they are probably seeking happiness on their own terms, and not on God's.

So let me point out what is very obvious in this Psalm, happiness is a very personal matter. And I am speaking now even for those of us who are the Lord's people. A Christian husband is not happy just because he has a truly happy wife. Children who are Christians are not happy just because their parents are happy. You might have a very dear personal friend who always seems to be happy in the Lord, but you can't quite keep up with him, or her, in that area. A church might be filled with people who are predominantly happy people, and yet that doesn't guarantee that if you go to that church you are going to be happy. Happiness is a personal matter. If we would realize this we would quit blaming others for our unhappiness. Our Psalm says, "Blessed is the man," meaning, man, or woman, young person, or child.

The Psalm would indicate, therefore, that it is possible to be saved, but not happy. And you find many who fall into that category. Perhaps there are times when we all have fallen into that class, saved, but not joyful in the Lord. Under heavy burdens, but carrying them ourselves.

But let us go on looking at this righteous man. I would like to speak of him as godly, but he is called righteous in verse 6. Whether or not he is godly is dependent upon what we are about to see.

If a righteous man wants to be happy, it is going to depend upon the way he lives. Some people live and work just to be able to buy things or do things which they feel are going to make them happy. And it is easy for a child of God to fall into that trap. So the Psalmist began by saying that happiness depends to a great extent upon what a person does not do. And we need to note that one of the first words in this Psalm is the word, "walketh," only here it is "walketh not." This speaks of the way a person lives.

Now we all need counsel, and we all are getting counsel, advice, direction, guidance from somewhere. We must not be afraid of the word counsel. Let us remember that our Lord Jesus Christ is called a "Wonderful Counsellor." The books of Psalms and Proverbs specialize on counsel, especially Proverbs. We find counsel also in Ecclesiastes. Every commandment in Scripture is counsel for us. But it is also possibly that we are taking our counsel from the ungodly people of the world, rather than from God!

Some of us were talking this morning about much that is called Christian counselling. Oftentimes it amounts to nothing more than the wisdom of the world given out by counsellors who call themselves Christians, but who have learned from secular teachers what they advise people to do.

All of us know what peer pressure is. It is especially disastrous to young people who are just beginning to make their own choices. And it is so much easier to succumb to what non-Christians want us to do than to look for our counsel where we should.

Standing in the way of sinners means that we are putting ourselves in situations where we are going to be tempted to do the wrong things. Our best friends are not the Lord's people. We may be able to stand for what we believe for a time, but if we continue hanging around with the wrong people, sooner or later we are going to fall.

Finally, the Psalmist spoke of sitting "in the seat of the scornful." You can see that there is a steady, a progressive downward trend. Relationships can start out looking harmless even when we are with the people of the world, but sooner or later we will find that this ridicules the things we believe and the things we stand for. They look down on anything that has to do with God, but the greater tragedy is when a Christian begins to feel that way.

It may look like people in the world are having a great time, that they have found happiness in things that we know are wrong in God's sight, but it is an empty happiness. A person who does not know the Savior has never experienced real happiness.

What then should a child of God do?

We learn in verse 2 what he needs to do, and then we learn in verse 3 the effect of doing what is said in verse 2.

Where is true happiness to be found? It is to be found in "the law of the Lord." The original revelations which God gave to man were spoken of as "the law." Genesis tells about days before the Mosaic Law was given, and yet it was considered under the title, "law." And as other books were added to the Scriptures, often they all were referred to as the law. So, therefore, we are justified in saying that when the Psalmist spoke of the law of the Lord, he was speaking of all of the Word of God which he had at that time.

But what does it mean to delight in the Word of God?

We delight in anything when we cannot leave it alone. We delight in something when we find ourselves coming back to it again and again. We delight in something we really enjoy it and will always have a place for it in our lives.

We all know that we need to read the Word of God. God gave

us a book which we need to read. But it is possible to read it as a duty, or to ease our consciences that we are doing what we ought to do, but delighting it is something different. We delight in the Word of God when we know that we must have it. We feel like Job who felt that it was more important to him than food for his body. Or like Jeremiah who said that it was "the joy and rejoicing of his heart." The writer of Psalm 119 was expressing his delight in the Word of God when he wrote, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psa. 119:97).

Now one of the other verses we memorized in our last SS series was Joshua 1:8 where we see what the Lord told Joshua as Joshua was taking over the leadership of Israel. (Quote.) There he was told to meditate in the book of the law "day and night." That is what it means to delight in the Word of God. And it is when we give the Word of God the pre-eminent place in our daily lives, the Lord will see to it that we delight in the Word. It probably is true that one of the first signs you see that a person has come to Christ, is that he or she has a love for the Word of God. He loves to read it. He wants to understand it. He goes where he can hear it taught. He reads books that will help him. And that delight in the Word should grow continually as long as we are on this earth.

But there is a word here which is not given as much attention as should be given to it. I am referring to the word, "meditate." This means that we not only need to hear the Word, and hear the Word, but we need to think about what we read. We need to ponder what the Word says. We need to run it over and over in our minds. There is even in this word "meditate" the idea that we need to be talking about it. Talk to others who will be able to help you to understand it, or who can be helped by what the Lord has been teaching you. There are many who faithfully read the Bible, but who spend practically no time thinking about what they have read. We can't always have our Bibles before us, but we can cultivate the habit of thinking about what we have read on a particular day, or on a message which we have heard which has made some part of the Word of God clearer.

But let us remember this: The object of meditation is obedience! The Lord told Joshua that he should meditate in the Word of God that he might "observe to do according to all that is written therein." We will soon lose our delight in the Word if we falter in our obedience to the Word. And the Lord has so ordered our relationship with Him that it is through obedience to the Word that our lives are changed, and we gradually become what He wants us to be. Joshua's success as the leader of the Israelites was inseparably linked with the Word of God. And that is true for all of us. We must

read it, seek through meditation to understand it, the Holy Spirit being our Teacher, and then seek from God the grace to do what He wants us to do, or not to do, that we might become what he wants us to be.

— If the Lord would only impress this word meditate upon all of our hearts tonight, what a difference it would make in our lives for this coming year. This is one reason it is good to memorize the Word. Memorization is an excellent aid to meditation. It keeps the Word of God in our minds and in our hearts.

But now, what are the benefits of getting the guidance we need for our lives from the Word of God?

Look at verse 3, and compare this with Jer. 17:5-8.

According to Psalm 1 meditation which leads to obedience produces five results:

- 1) He will be like a tree--stable and strong.
- 2) He will have a secret source of nourishment that will continue to give him strength.
- 3) He will be fruitful.
- 4) His testimony will not fade; his leaf will not wither.
- 5) Whatever he does, will prosper.

— But now for the other side:

II. THE UNGODLY MAN (Psa. 1:4, 5).

Remember that an ungodly man can be a very respectable man, a leader in business or in society, a success in his chosen way of life, but he is ungodly because he is not interested in God, he certainly has no desire to be what God wants people to be, and he is not interested in knowing about God. He has no place for the Bible in his life. From the world's standpoint he seems to have it made.

Of course an ungodly man can be at the other end of the human scale, too--wicked, criminal, and all of the other classifications that you want to mention. And the ungodly fall into all type in between the high and the low.

They have their own wisdom, their own way of life, their own objectives. But what does God say about them? The "are like the chaff which the wind driveth away." What a difference from those who are like trees.

— And what is worst of all, the day is coming when they will find that they are not going to be judged by man's standards, but by God Himself. All that they have done will amount to

nothing. Nor will they in that day be allowed to associate with the people of God. They will be like the rich man who wanted to warn his family, but was told that if they would not accept the Word of God, they would not be persuaded of the truth even if one were to arise from the dead, and go to them.

What a tragic surprise awaits multitudes of people who have refused to listen to the Word of God in this life. But, oh, the joy, the continual joy, the increasing joy, of those who delight themselves in the Word and in the Lord. Their joy, their happiness, will know no bounds!

Now we come to the last verse.

III. THE REASON FOR THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO (Psa. 1:6).

Listen to what Derek Kidner wrote about this verse in his commentary on Psalm 1:

To 'know' is more than to be informed (as in 139:1-6): it includes to care about, as in 31:7 (Heb. 8), and to own or identify oneself with (cf. Pr. 3:6). To perish is used in many sense: here for instance of a road or course that comes to nothing or to ruin; elsewhere of plans frustrated (g.g. 112:10; Pr. 11:7), or creatures that get lost (119:176), and of men and achievements that come to grief (2:11; 9:6). The New Testament brings to light the eternal implications which are already contained in it (e.g., John 3:16).

So the two ways, and there is no third part, for ever (p. 49).

It is God with whom we have to do, and our eternal destiny is in His hands.

Concl: So, when I wish you a happy new year, I do it in the light of Psalm 1 -- a year in which you delight yourself in the Word of God, and, under the blessing of God, reap the results that are promised us here in this part of God's Word.