

THE WAY TO TRUE HAPPINESS

Psalm 1

Intro: Almost every commentator who has written on the Psalms, has called this the introduction to the Psalms. In some ways it is like the Proverbs of Solomon in which it sets forth a contrast between two kinds of men: the man of God and the man of the world. It depicts the godly man first, and follows with the ungodly. The two ways of life are entirely different, but each has the same goal, and that goal is happiness. There is in every human heart the desire to be happy, and to avoid unhappiness. The godly man has one distinct advantage over the ungodly man. It is that he has the Word of God to guide him. The ungodly man is left to his own devices. He follows the desires of his heart as well as the example of those whom he thinks have found the way to true happiness.

The Psalmist, probably David, describes the guarantee that the godly man will find happiness, and then follows it with that which most men follow, the way of the ungodly man which, although like Moses exposed to the Egyptian way of life, has its "pleasures of sin for a season," yet in the long run, is not worthy to be compared with the way that God has revealed as *the way to true happiness*. In fact, the way of the Lord is so superior to the ways of man that the Psalmist, guided by the Holy Spirit, and doubtless supported by his own obedience to the Lord, that he speaks not only of happiness, but a word which we rarely hear, *the happinesses!* This is the proper translation of the Hebrew word that is used here in verse 1. This means that God promises multiplied happinesses, happiness in many different ways and of many different kinds, to the man who chooses God's way in preference to man's ways.

Our Lord was speaking of happiness when the two brothers were in an argument over their inheritance, one of them came to the Lord asking Him to be the arbitrator between them. But the Lord refused to be the judge. Instead He warned them with these words:

Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15).

We see how the world contradicts that statement by the way we are plagued with commercials trying to convince us that our lives will be so much happier if we will only buy the product that they are trying to sell.

But let us see what this Psalm tell us about the nature of true happiness.

I. THE TRUE HAPPINESS (Psa. 1:1-3).

The Psalmist began on a negative note. It is like raising a blockade in front of the very way men are inclined to take. It is apparent that true happiness is not a combination of what the world says, and with what God says, but it has to be God's way for true happiness to be the result.

A. The warning – the three negatives (Psa. 1:1).

The people who are without God and without salvation are described as "ungodly . . . sinners . . . scornful." And there seems to be a certain declension indicated by the words "walketh not . . . nor standeth . . . nor sitteth." The word "counsel" points to the human wisdom that leads, not to happiness, but farther and farther away.

A person is ungodly who really has no place for God in his life. He does not even recognize that he is responsible to God as a creature is to the Creator. But he is a sinner at heart.

By the word "sinners" the Psalmist seems to add transgressions to the record of the ungodly man. A man who does not give God the primary place in his life will add more and more sins to his record and to his life.

And this ultimately leads to *scorning*. Such a person can be religious, but he has no place for God, no place for repentance, no place for the Word of God. He becomes actively opposed to the truth of God.

And the *walking and standing and sitting* show how the degeneration in the life of such a person gradually enslaves and destroys. It starts by doing that which is according to "the counsel of the ungodly," and gradually becomes more satisfactory, and finally the sinner is completely satisfied as is pictured by his sitting.

This pictures man as following the inclinations of his own heart, in the circumstances he finds in the world, and, of course, it is all under the influence of the Evil One.

So if a person is to find the happiness which he desires, he has to learn at the outset that it is not to be found in the world, in the ways of the world, or in following the people of the world.

We need to recognize that these are not the terms that people in the world use for themselves, but it is God's revelation of the increasing effect that sin has in people's lives, moving them farther and farther away from the

happiness that they so earnestly desire.

Now let us look at:

B. The right way (Psa. 1:2-3).

We used to hear that the Bible was the world's best selling book. I have not heard that in a long time. It used to be true that there was a Bible in almost every home, and usually that people in a family each had his own Bible. I know that is not true anymore. The farther our society has moved away from God, the farther it has moved away from the Bible. And the tragedy of this is that in moving away from the Bible, our generation has moved away from any possibility that the people of this generation will ever experience true happiness. And what is even more tragic is the fact that many who profess to be Christians do not read the Bible, and they are not taught the Bible in their churches. People are being taught to go to church to have fun, but not to learn to know God through the faithful teaching of the Word of God.

But the Bible is the Word of God. It is God's message to men, and it contains truth that cannot be found anywhere else.

Now the Psalm said here that a person's experience of happiness is not just in possessing a Bible, nor even in occasionally reading the Bible (even when it is read daily), but in *delighting "in the law of the Lord."* This word "law" does not just mean the law given by God to Moses, but it is a term which refers to all of God's revealed Word. "Law" basically means *teaching*. God teaches us in His Word truth which will not be found anywhere else unless it is in books which carefully seek to explain the Scriptures.

To delight in the Word of God is to take pleasure in it. It is to treat it as a very precious thing. It is to desire it, to consider it like Job did when he said,

Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food (Job 23:12).

It is to consider it as our most precious possession. Jeremiah delighted in the Word of the Lord, and so he wrote these words:

Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts (Jer. 15:16).

That which we delight in is that which we turn to as often as we can, and when we are busy with other things, we still find a place for that which delights us. In the case of the Word, we want to read it. We love to talk about it. We want to memorize it. And we want to go where others can help us to understand it. We love to read books about the Bible, but if we delight in it, even those books cannot replace the Word of God in our lives.

And the Psalmist explained here in this Psalm what it means to delight ourselves in the Word of God. "And in his law doth he meditate day and night." "Day and night" means *constantly*. Fausset, in the JFB commentary explained meditation in this way:

Meditation upon, is to reading the Word what digesting is to eating. Without the slow and lengthened process of digestion, food would not nourish the body: without meditation, the Word read will not nourish the soul.

The Psalmist here was evidently led by the Spirit to remember what the Lord had told Joshua when he took over the leadership of the people of Israel after the death of Moses. Let me remind you of those words of the Lord:

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success (Joshua 1:8).

Now this is followed by verse 3 in which we read of the results that will take place when we delight in the Word of the Lord, and faithfully meditate on what we read.

B. The results of such delight in the Word of the Lord.

The results are twofold: (1) in the person himself, and (2) in what he does.

Jeremiah has given us a very close duplication of this part of Psalm 1. It is found in Jer. 17:7-8, and it helps us to understand Psalm 1. Here is what Jeremiah wrote:

7 Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.

8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat

cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit (Jer.17: 7-8).

Now the Psalmist did not elaborate on the happiness that was spoken of at the beginning of verse 1 in our Psalm, but anyone who has faithfully given the Word of God such a place in his daily life, does not need to have that happiness explained. The joy, the manifold, many-sided joy will be there, and the world has nothing that can compare with it. We become like trees whose leaves never fade. The water of the Word continually nourishes us, and we are enabled to bring forth fruit to God.

But let me remind you that there is only one kind of a person who will feel this way about the Bible. That is a person who knows the Lord, who has experienced the saving grace of God like Job did, and like David did, and like Jeremiah did, and like a host of others whose story is given to us in both the OT and the NT. The world is less interested in the Bible today than ever before. But it is still the same wonderful Word of God, and it is through that Word that the Lord brings that abounding joy into the hearts of His people. "Great peace have they which love Thy Law, and nothing shall offend them" (Psa. 119:165).

Are you experiencing that joy? Do you look forward to another day and the opportunity that it gives you to read your Bible? There can be no real happiness apart from the Word of God.

But what did the Psalmist have to say about the rest of the human family?

III. GOD'S DECLARATION CONCERNING THE UNGODLY (Psa. 1:4-6).

It is summed up in these words: "The ungodly are not so." They are "not so" in their joy. They are not so in their characters. They are "not so" in the permanence of the work that they do. There is no way in which the man who puts God out of his life can experience true happiness, nor will he experience the satisfaction in his life that a godly person has.

What a picture we have in likening them to "the chaff which the wind driveth away."

But what is even worse is that, while they stand in their own way, they will not "stand in the judgment" before God, nor will they have a place "in

the congregation of the righteous." You see, the joy that we have in the Lord and in His Word carries over into eternity itself. And the person who has never turned to the Lord nor to His Word, is the person who will have no hope at all when the time comes for him or her to stand before God.

And why is this so?

Because "the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." Kidner, in his book on the Psalms, says of this statement that it means far more than just that the Lord is informed about the way we have taken, but that He cares for us, and claims us as His own, identifying Himself with us as those who belong to Him.

That which awaits the ungodly is summed up in that word "perish" – which means, not annihilation, but eternal judgment.

Concl: So it is important to see that what separates the godly from the ungodly is the Word of God. Let us make sure that we belong among those who treasure the Word above all of our other possessions. It not only means joy, but it means life forevermore.