

**GOD'S PRESCRIPTION FOR HAPPINESS**

## Psalm 1

**Intro:** It seems as though each year, at the beginning of the year especially, my thoughts turn to the first Psalm. And I like to think that it is the Lord Who turns my thoughts in that direction. I have preached on this Psalm many times, and I always find that it is especially profitable for myself. Many who have written on the Psalms believe that Psalm 1 has been placed where it is, not because it was the first Psalm ever to be written (because it was not the first), but because it serves as an introduction to all of the Psalms. It deals with a subject which is important to every person who has ever lived, the subject of happiness. This is the meaning of the first word in the Psalm, "Blessed." It also deals with the greatest danger that you and I face from day to day, and that is sin. And it also deals with the most wonderful book that has ever been written, "the Law of God," which is another term for the Word of God. It tells us that there are just two kinds of people in the world – the ungodly and the righteous. And it sets before us just two possibilities – becoming like trees, or being "like the chaff which the wind driveth away." But lest we think that ungodliness and righteousness have to do only with this life, Psalm 1 teaches us that there is a judgment to come. The ungodly may stand in the way of sinners (v. 1), but they will not stand in the judgment to come. Sometimes the distinction between the ungodly and the righteous is not clear to men, but the difference is never a mystery to God. He knows the way of the righteous. He has designed it. He has called the righteous to it. And He has blessed and sustained them in it. But the way that the ungodly have chosen for themselves leads to death – to eternal death. As Solomon said twice in the book of Proverbs, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). Just as the Apostle Paul wrote years later in his letter to the church at Rome, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Psalm 1 puts an entirely different meaning on the words we say and hear over and over again at this time of the year, the word, "Happy New Year!" This Psalm tells us very clearly how every year can be a happy year.

But what do most people have in mind when they say this? "Happy New Year!" I am not talking especially about Christians now, but it may be that not all Christians really know what a happy new year is. It is certain-

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ly true that most people don't think about the Lord when they think of the year to come. They have not been thinking about the Lord during the past years. "Happy New Year" to most people is probably a wish for a trouble-free year, and yet no one ever has a trouble-free year. Troubles and trials come to all of us. One of Job's friends recognized this when he said to Job that "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Quoting Solomon again, he said, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27:1). We have no control over what will be tomorrow, but those of us who know the Lord have learned that the Lord gives us blessings that go far beyond what we could ever deserve.

Americans are people who relate happiness to money because money buys things that they want and money enable them to do what they want to do and to go where they want to go. We define "the good life" as a life in which we can a lot of fun. And yet the pursuit of pleasure is vanity; it is an empty life.

Some people define the good life as a life in which they are meeting goals which they have set for themselves. But so often these goals just have to do with this life, with no thought given to the life that is to come, and no thought as to what it takes to be pleasing to God now.

Well, let us begin to look now into this great Psalm to learn what we can about the life which can bring us true happiness. And I would call your attention to the first word in the first verse:

### **I. THE WORD "BLESSED."**

Psalm 1 gives us excellent advice, perfect advice, as to how we can have a happy new year. And if you have never committed Psalm 1 to memory, I recommend that you do it before this year of 2001 gets any older because if you and I go by what this verse tells us, there is no question but that this will be a happy new year for us. In fact, it will be a year of multiplied blessings because the first word of the Psalm in Hebrew is a plural, and is intended to be exclamatory: "O the blessednesses of the man . . ." Or we could translate it, "O the multiplied happinesses of the man" who listens to the Word of God, and lives his life accordingly.

The same word is used in Psalm 32:1, one of David's Psalms in which he was rejoicing in the forgiveness of his sins, but he applied it to all of us

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sinners. “Oh, the blessednesses of him whose transgress is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.”

And we have this again in Psalm 40:4:

Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies (Psa. 40:4).

And then David added this fifth verse:

Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered (Psa. 40:5)..

How thankful we should all be for the Word of God! Because we are sinners we are so easily deceived! And David could not contain himself when he spoke about these truths which God had revealed to him, and then had him write them down so we could profit from them today. There is no question but that God wants every year to be a happy year for us, but we have to seek happiness in His way, not ours.

Let me give you one more example of this word “blessed” as it appears in the plural of the Hebrew text. It is found in Proverbs 8:34 where Solomon was speaking of the wisdom of God, which we know is personified in Christ. He is the power of God and the wisdom of God, as we learned in our SS lesson for today. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:24. But here is the verse in Proverbs, reading verse 35 with it:

34 Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.

35 For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD (Prov. 8:34-35).

So here it is again. Do you know where Solomon got this word “blessed” in the plural as an exclamation? I know that the Spirit of God directed him to write this verse, but it is most likely that He learned it from his father, David. And I have Solomon’s own words for saying this. If you look at Proverbs 4, you will read these words beginning with verse 3:

3 For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.

4 He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.

5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.

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6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.

7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

8 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.

9 She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee (Prov. 4:3-9).

These verses leave us with no doubt but that David was excited about the Word of God in his day, and he got his son, Solomon, excited about it too. And that excitement needs to get into our hearts. God wants us to be happy, truly happy, and He has told us how we can be happy. But the only place you can find the way is by reading and reading and reading the Word.

By the way, have you started to read through the Bible this year? Every one of us needs to read through the Bible at least once every year. So if you haven't started, get a schedule today, and begin to read. It is there, in the Word, that we too will get excited to see how many blessings God is ready to give us so that this can be truly a happy year.

But let us move on in Psalm 1. We don't really know who wrote this Psalm. We do know that Jeremiah was acquainted with it. Listen to his words which we find in Jer. 17:7 and 8:

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.

That sounds like Psalm 1:3, doesn't it?

One other hint as to the time of the writing is the Psalmist's use of the word "scorner" which only appears here in all of the Psalms, but was used by Solomon in Prov. 21:24. So this would seem to eliminate David as the writer, but we can't even say that for sure. So it is best to say that it is the Word of God, but we aren't sure who the writer was. But the writer began on a negative note, telling us:

## II. WHERE WE WILL NOT FIND HAPPINESS (Psa. 1:1).

A few years ago it was popular among some teachers to say that we need to emphasize the positive statements of Scripture, not the negative. This probably was the result of a lot of negative teaching about the Christian life – don't do this, don't say that, don't go there, and so on. Maybe there was an overemphasis on the negative, but you don't correct a problem by ignoring what is often the emphasis of Scripture. In fact, we often have to talk negatively in order for people to understand fully the positive aspects of Christian living. Much, very much, of the Bible is negative. The first verse of this Psalm is all negative. And the reason is that we live in an ungodly world, a world that has no place for God, no place for His Word, no place for Christ or the Holy Spirit, no place for salvation. We live and breathe in a world that is held under the power and influence of the Evil One. Not all that we hear is necessarily anti-God, but the wisdom of this world has no place for God. Most weather reports that we hear have nothing to say about God and what God may be doing in our weather, but it is usually attributed to Mother Nature. Now if we attribute the work of the living God to a non-existent Mother Nature, this is blasphemy

And yet much is anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-Bible. We have so many different religions in our country today that it is not politically correct to say that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Modern psychology does not point us to God, but it makes us look to ourselves, or to other people, assuring us that we can do whatever we believe we can do. The wisdom of this world is humanistic. Let us spend a few minutes looking at the words which the Psalmist used here to describe the people of the world. There are three of them: "the ungodly . . . sinners . . . scornful." What do they mean?

### A. "Ungodly."

The English dictionary defines an ungodly person as one who is disobedient to God. And the Hebrew word that is used here means one who is a criminal in God's sight. And in everyday language a criminal is a person who has violated the law. This is what we all once were – guilty criminals before a holy God, under condemnation.

This word is used four times in Psalm 1 – here in verse 1, and once each in verses 4, 5, and 6. The translation given most often to the 262 times this word is used in the OT, is the word "wicked." This is the word used in Psa. 58:3 where we read,

The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon

as they be born, speaking lies.

And this is the word that Isaiah used twice when he wrote Isa. 57:20-21:

20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest,  
whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

You wouldn't buy a home or a car from a person you knew was a criminal; why seek counsel from one who is under the sentence of death by the God of heaven.

The second word is:

### **B. "Sinners."**

This is one who has deviated from the right way. His life is wrong, and so he is in no position nor condition to be able to guide others in the right way. This word is like the NT word for a sinner, one who misses the mark. It is used again in verse 5 of Psalm 1. If this person dies without being changed in his heart through being saved by Christ, don't expect to see him in heaven because he won't be there. That is the meaning of verse 5.

The third word is:

### **C. "Scornful."**

This is the strongest of the three words. He openly attacks and scorns and derides God, the truth of God, and the people of God. This is the kind of a person that Saul of Tarsus was before he was saved on the road to Damascus. This word describes the Devil. He walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. See 1 Peter 5:8.

Now there is a clear degeneration indicated in the use of these words. We all start out bad because we are sinners by nature. And if we continue in our sins, without coming to Christ, things get worse and worse in our lives, and we get farther and farther from God.

Remember if you want to know the truth about man, all men, all people, regardless of nationality, or sex, or age, you will find it in the Bible. And the wisdom of the natural man, called here "counsel," will only lead us into the wrong "way" of life. We start out by walking, and then standing,

and finally sitting.

**Concl:** So all of this means that if we are seeking happiness the way the world would have us go, seeking it in pleasure, or in positions, or possessions, with no thought of God or of what it takes to please Him, we will never know true happiness.

But the point that the Psalmist was making here is that we must deliberately stay away from the world and all of its counsel with regard to the way we live.

As I close, let me borrow a word from verse 2 which we will come to next week, the Lord willing. It is the word “delight.” It is a word which means *that which you and I desire above everything else*, it is *that which we consider to be the most valuable things in life*, it is *that which gives us the greatest pleasure*. What is it that we really take delight in? Is it the world and its way of life? If it is, then we will never find true happiness, the happiness that this Psalmist was so excited about.

So, when we say, “Happy New Year,” let us have in mind what God means about true happiness – a life of knowing God through Jesus Christ, of loving God, and of seeking with all of our hearts to do His will as He has revealed it to us in His priceless and eternally unchanging Word. That is the pathway to true happiness, a life away from sin and toward God.

When we go to our doctors, they examine us, and then they may prescribe medicine that they want us to take, they tell us food that we should eat, and food that we should not eat. They prescribe for us what they believe will help us, and give us better health. Think of the Bible that way, and especially Psalm 1. It is “God’s prescription for happiness.” And it always works every time. We are not finished with it, but let us take to heart what we have seen today. This is the negative side. Verse 2 gives us the positive side. The two together result in true, satisfying happiness.