

WHAT IS A TRULY HAPPY NEW YEAR?

Psalm 1

Intro: For several years in the past I have spoken on Psalm 1 on either the last Sunday of the old year, or on the first Sunday of the new year. This year it is on the last Sunday of the old year. I hope that by this time you have committed it to memory. We can never be reminded too often of the importance of the Word of God in our lives as Christians. That is the reason I have chosen to speak on this Psalm as often as I have. For a long time it has been one of my favorite Psalms. Most writers whose works I have read on this Psalm say that it is where it is in the arrangement of the Psalms, not because it was the first Psalm written (because it wasn't), but because, as Charles Simeon said many years ago:

The Psalm before us seems properly placed, as a kind of preface to the whole; inasmuch as it contains a summary description of the righteous and the wicked, both in their character and their end (*Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible*, Vol. 5, p. 1).

We do not know who wrote this Psalm because no name is mentioned along with the number of the Psalm. The same is true of Psalm 2. Beginning with Psalm 3 we have a Psalm of David who wrote most of the Psalms, but not all of them.

Another unique feature of this Psalm is that he is not described by any title, such as godly, until we get down to verses 5 and 6 when we come upon the word “righteous” which is one way of identifying the man whom the Psalmist had in mind from the beginning. The point of the Psalm is that this man who obviously is living a life that is pleasing to God, is not best described by some title, but by what he does not do, first of all, and then by what he does do. Notice this in the psalm. What he does not do in verse 1, and what he does in verse 2. And then in verse 3 the Psalmist added the productiveness in this happy man's life.

Unfortunately we have turned things around from what they were in Bible times. Now we ask a person if he is a Christian, or we simply treat him (or her) as a Christian because he goes to church. Or because he has been baptized and has joined a church. But Psalm 1 indicates right at the beginning of this entire book of Psalms that the basic test which need to be applied to all is us, is what we do not do, but what we do. The main emphasis for what a Christian does not do, has to do with *sin*. The focus upon what he does do, has to do with “the law of the Lord.” And this

expression, as it is used here, does not apply just to the ten commandments as given by Moses to the nation of Israel, *but it applies to all of the Word of God*. The Psalmist was speaking here about the Bible which is now made up of an old testament and a new testament. But we will come back to that in a moment.

Exposition

The main reason that I have identified this Psalm with the beginning of the new year is because of the greeting that we give to each other on January 1, or as we are approaching January 1. The word “blessed” means *happy*, or *happiness*. It is a masculine plural, and can be translated *how happy*, or, *O the happinesses*, speaking of the multiplied happinesses which this Psalm promises. Our expression for this time in the calendar year, is “Happy New Year.” We all say, or send it on a card, and I like to send or deliver in person such a greeting. We want to be happy ourselves, and we like for other people to be happy too. But I want us to think about just what we mean when we give such a greeting. It would be wonderful if the new year were going to be without any troubles, without any sickness, or sorrows. But, while we know that the Bible reminds us that we do not know what a day may bring forth (Prov. 27:1), we know that we never had a trouble-free year yet, nor do we know anyone else who has had a year without trouble.

So the question arises, Is it possible to have a happy new year in spite of all of the difficulties we may have to face? And I believe that the answer to that question, is “YES!” I can’t tell you how many times I have gone to a hospital room to see some patient, praying that somehow I might be a blessing to them, only to come away believing that I am the one who received the blessing!

Those of us who know the Lord have the assurance from the Word itself that “it is God that worketh all things together for good to them the love the Lord, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). And didn’t Dr. Paul Felix, and later Pastor Will, point out to us in the NT epistle of James that we are to “count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations”? Why, because we love trouble? No, but because we know that the trial of our faith worketh patience. And then James added, “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (Jas. 1:1-3).

Do you remember that wonderful old hymn by William Cowper which has that line,

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Those of us who know the Lord have access to the God of all grace whose grace is sufficient for us, and whose strength is made perfect in our weakness. See 2 Cor. 12:9.

You can add many verses to these. Our happiness is not dependent on the absence of all trouble and trial, but it is promised to us in the midst of our trials. God gives us happiness not through peace without, but through peace within. He has promised never to leave us, nor forsake us. He even makes the wrath of men to praise Him. See Psalm 76:10.

But none of this is automatic. And that is what the Psalmist is teaching us here. Most people want to have a happy new year. We like for every day to be happy. But the problem with most people, and even with many people who call themselves Christians, is that they are looking for happiness in the wrong places. And the Psalmist states very emphatically that happiness is never found in sin. What is sin? Well, I think that the simplest definition of sin is that it is anything that is displeasing to God. And there are positive and negative aspects to sin. Sin is sometimes doing what displeases God. At other times, sin is not doing what we are supposed to do. If we don't praise the Lord for our blessing, that is sin. If we fail to worship God, that is sin. The Bible is full of commandments concerning things we are to avoid. On the other hand if we don't love God, that is sin. If we fail to seek His will, and to do it. That is sin. There are hundreds of commandments in Scripture to guide us in knowing and doing the will of God. We can't ignore God and still expect to be happy, not with the happiness that carries us through all of the circumstances of life. This does not mean that we will not suffer, nor does it mean that there won't be tears to shed. But it does mean that we can have true happiness if we live by the Word of God. Paul wrote these words from a Roman prison. You will find them in Philippians 4:6-7:

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

So prayer is an important part of a happy life. Inner peace is a vital part of true happiness.

But now look at the way the Psalmist spoke of sin. He described the progressive way in which sin affects our lives. He did it with three verbs: walking, standing, and sitting. First, we need to be careful about following the advice of people who are not concerned about God. They don't think in terms of pleasing God. Second, we need to be careful about people who pass their lives in sin, especially the coarser sins, the bigger, the better. Third, people who makes jokes about sin, belittling those who refuse to compromise with them. These rather summarize the attitude of worldly people toward Christians and any talk about being influenced by God or His judgment upon sin.

But all of this has to do with primarily negative attitudes and behavior which are contrary to sin. But it is never enough just to be negative against sin. Sooner or later, if this is all that people have, they will give in to sin. Surely no person who has not been saved, can do battle successfully with sin. But even with those of us who know the Lord, trying to deal with sin in our own strength and will power, will ultimately lead to defeat. We see what else is absolutely vital in verse 2. (Read.)

What the Psalmist wrote here in verse 2 is reflected in Psalm 119:11: "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee." And when the Lord Jesus was with His disciples, and had been teaching them, He said this about His teaching, His Word. I am reading from John 15:11:

11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

There is an inseparable connection between the true joy that we have in our hearts, and the Word of God. Sin produces a substitute joy, which turns bitter if we submit to it. Let me say it again. On the other hand, there is an inseparable connection between true joy and the place that we give to the Word of God in our lives.

I want to spend a few moments on the word that the Psalmist used here concerning our relationship to the Bible. And you decide if this description is true of you. The question is, and it is a very important question, What does it mean to "delight" ourselves in the Word of God, or, to state it another way, *What does it mean for you to delight yourself in your Bible?*

The verb that the Psalmist used here means that it is that which gives you great pleasure. It means that which you consider to be very precious. You would actually treasure it above any other book that you have, or any other book you have ever read. It means that you love to think about it, to turn it over and over in your mind trusting the Spirit of God to make it clearer and clearer to you. Martin Luther was saying what it meant to him to delight himself in the Word when he said, "My heart is captive to the Word of God."

If you can take your Bible home today, lay it down, and not pick it up again until you come back to church, then you haven't learned to delight yourself in the Word. Even if you read your Bible every day, but you do it just to complete the chapters that are assigned for that day, then you haven't learned to delight yourself in the Word of God.

A couple of good examples from the Bible of men who had learned to delight themselves in the Word, are, first of all, Job. This is what he said about the Word. You will find these words in Job 23:11-12:

11 My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.

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

If Job got a late start any morning and only had time either for breakfast, or the reading of the Word (as little as He had of it then), He would choose in favor of the Word. Is that what you would do? Our eating time is very important to most of us, and it has to be something we consider more important to us than eating to get us away from the table. And notice that Job compared the Word, not just with dessert, but his "necessary food."

The other verse is from Jeremiah. You can't read his prophecy without wondering how he ever survived the persecution that He experienced. Here is his answer in His own words found in Jeremiah 15:16:

16 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.

You have to experience it in order to understand what Jeremiah was talking about.

Delighting in the Word is the first step in learning to delight ourselves in

the Lord. See Psa. 37:4.

Meditation is almost a lost art these days. But it is vital if we are to make progress in our lives as Christians. Cf. Joshua 1:8:

8 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.

Even the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about the importance of meditation. See 1 Timothy 4:15, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all."

One more verse and my message for today will be completed. It is verse 3. (Read.) The last three verses are also important, but if we can all get the first three verses into our hearts, we won't have to worry about the rest of the Psalm.

The way to verse 3 is through verse 2. It is verses 1 and 2 that produce stability (like a tree planted), and fruitfulness (especially the fruit of the Spirit), and secure prosperity in the work of the Lord. But notice the statement, "His leaf also shall not wither." I am not an expert in planting or caring for trees, but I know that, except in the Fall when trees normally lose their leaves, that withering leaves are a sign that a tree is in trouble. We as the people of God are like trees, and what a sad thing it is when the outward appearance begins to wither. It is evidence that there is trouble within! And we see this far too often. What has gone wrong? That person has either grown careless about sin, or about his relationship with the Word of God, or both. Trouble may be going on in our hearts long before it begins to show outwardly. But eventually we start to wither.

What is essential in your life and my life to prevent that from happening?
Two things:

- 1) Be very, very careful about sin in any form.
- 2) Be very, very faithful about reading the Word, delighting ourselves in it, and meditating upon it.

This is not a prescription of either, or; but of both, and.