

HOW TO HAVE A HAPPY NEW YEAR

Psalm 1

Intro: We have no way of telling how old this Psalm is, but it seems that the whole book of Psalms was in existence in the days of Ezra who is credited by many Bible scholars as having been the first one to compile the books of the OT. That would mean that the Psalm had been written, in round numbers, at least 500 years before Christ, and probably many years before that. And so, like all of the Psalms, it is a very ancient Psalm.

We believe that all of the Psalms, in fact, all of the books of the Bible, were written under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And so their age makes no difference, as far as their continuing importance is concerned for the people of God in every generation. But I mention this because what some Psalmist, and it could have been David, wrote, is just as true to describe a happy life now as it was whenever it was written. And this is quite an amazing thought. Throughout history many have written about happiness. Those books come and go. Writers have had many different ideas as to how we can be happy. Their ideas come, and their ideas go. Or their books have to be revised. But the Word of God needs no revision. What was true when Psalm 1 was written, is still true. And it is not just true for us in America today, but it is true for every nation and for every generation in every nation on the face of the earth. Now such a statement as I have just made would stir up a lot of strong opposition in many places, even in our own country, but God's Word is eternal and unchanging, and I stand by what I have said.

If we were to go to people in our country today, and ask them what it takes, or would take, to make them happy, you would have countless numbers of responses, none which would have anything to do with Psalm 1.

Now we can draw several observations from Psalm 1 which have to do with a happy life, or a happy new year.

The first is that there can be no true happiness apart from God. And when I say "God," I am not talking about any god, but I am talking about the God of the Bible, the God Who created the heavens and the earth, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of salvation from sin. In Psalm 1 He is called, "the Lord." See verses 2.

Psalm 1 (2)

The second fact that becomes apparent is that true, lasting happiness, is not to be found in sin. And when you look at humanity throughout this history, and coming right down to today, it is in sin in some form that most people are looking for happiness. And I am not talking just about gross immorality. I am talking about all kinds of sin, even sins which Dr. Jerry Bridges in his new book, calls *Respectable Sins*, sins like pride, selfishness, impatience, and envy. Sin is anything and everything that is displeasing to God. The God of the Bible has told us in the Bible what sin is. And woe to us if we are ignorant of what the Bible says either about what is pleasing to God, or what is displeasing to Him.

And this leads me to a third fact that is brought out in this ancient Psalm which gives us God's prescription for happiness. And this is that the truly happy person finds great joy in the Bible. The Psalmist's description of a truly happy person is that "his delight is in the law of the Lord," and he meditates in it day and night. That is, he is constantly reading the Bible, and thinking about the Bible so as to learn more about what it has to say. And so this leads me to another very important point.

It is this: Psalm 1, like most of the Bible, was written for a person who knows the Lord. And by knowing the Lord I mean one who has recognized his, or her, need before God as a sinner. The Bible teaches that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It also teaches us that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." And most people who know anything about the Bible know John 3:16 which tells more about the gift of God, eternal life. John 3:16 says,

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

To believe in Christ is to put faith in Christ believing that when Christ died on the Cross, He died to save everyone who would ever believe in Him, that the Son of God came to earth, born of a virgin mother, in order to offer to God by His own death a sacrifice by which our sins are forgiven and we become the children of God. Then, and only then, will the real meaning of Psalm 1 be clear to us. If you have not received Christ as your Savior, you can tell the Lord that you want to be saved, and that you are trusting Christ to save you. The Lord will hear your prayer, and save you.

But now look at the Psalm itself. Being first does not mean that it was

Psalm 1 (3)

written first, but that it is in first place because it forms a fitting introduction to all of the Psalms.

The Psalm is divided into three parts:

- I. The description of the godly man (vv. 1-3).
- II. The description of the ungodly man (vv. 4-5).
- III. A contrast between the two (v.6).

- I. The description of the godly man (vv. 1-3).

Note the first word of the Psalm. The word translated “blessed” is in the plural. Spurgeon suggested that it might be translated, “Oh, the blessednesses . . .” *Happy* is an alternate translation. It suggests that there are multiplied happinesses that not only await the child of God, but are characteristic of him in his daily life. Of course the same applies to a lady, young person, or child who knows the Lord.

In verse 1 we have the child of God described negatively, and in verses 2 and 3, positively.

But the suggestion here which the Psalmist was making, is what you learn in all of Scripture, that a child of God is identified primarily by the way he lives. And it is consist. He walks and he stands and he sits within the in ways that are distinctly different from people who do not know the Lord, that is, the people of the world.

Notice the declension that is indicated here. If a person walks in the counsel of the ungodly, he will soon be satisfied to stand in the way of sinners, and sitting in the seat of the scorners is often taken as promoting such evil behavior. Teachers were often spoken of as those who sit in the seat, teaching what they have been taught, and scorning anyone who take a different course. The person who starts out in a bad way gradually gets worse and worse, just as the person who begins walking with God, takes his stand with other believers, and finally sits in the seat of the righteous, seeking to win others to the Lord to live a better and happier life.

“The counsel of the ungodly” is the wisdom of those who make no place for God in their lives, which is the way in which the ungodly live. The way of sinners” is the life style of those who are guilty. “The seat of the scornful” is one who ridicules, mocks, and scoffs at others who live in a different way.

Psalm 1 (4)

But when you go on to verse 2 you see that the objective of the ungodly, the sinner, and the scornful is very clearly “the Law of the Lord.” Now I have mentioned before that early in the history of Israel “the Law of the Lord” was a title given to the law of Moses. But as time went on it became a synonym for all of the revealed Word of God. It is the Bible that the world is against in an increasing way. They don’t want to read it. They don’t believe it. They don’t want to obey it. Why is there such an outcry today against sin? Because the Bible teaches sin, exposes sin, and condemns sin.

But the person who is godly, whose heart has been changed by the Gospel of God’s grace, *delights* in the Word of God. What does it mean that multiplied happinesses come from the Word of God for the godly man? It means that he desires it, he delights in it. He counts it a most valuable treasure. And he meditates in it day and night, that is, he reads it, he keeps it in his mind and heart. He is always thinking about it, and wanting to learn more of its truth.

This is not where anyone begins, but teach it to a child and it will be a very unusual thing for him to do anything but desire more and more of it as he gets older. We can test our relationship to God by how we feel about the Word of God. The person who claims to be a Christian, but never reads the Word of God, never goes where he or she can be taught more about the Word, is probably not a Christian. It is significant that this stands at the beginning of the book of Psalms because it is all a vital part of God’s Word, His message to men on earth, the agent of their salvation and of their growth in the Lord. In Psalm 119:97 we read that the writer of that long Psalm said, “Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.” When Joshua took over the reigns of government from Moses, this is among what the Lord said to him:

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 they thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success (Joshua 1:8).

When the Apostle Paul was instructing younger Timothy concerning the work that he was to do as a servant of the Lord, this is what Paul said to him: You will find these words in 1 Timothy 4:12-16:

12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

Psalm 1 (5)

13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

15 Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.

16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

You see, the object of reading and meditating on the Word, is the transformation of our lives, and the transformation of our lives is fruitful service.

It used to be that Bible teachers used cows chewing the cud as an illustration of meditation. The cow will graze in the pasture, and then go and sit down, bring up what she has eaten, and chew it up before digesting it. That is what we do in meditation. We read the Word, and then recall what we have read, and think about it, to make it our own and to gain strength from it.

Do you see the order that is apparent in the first three verses? The person who is to experience all kinds of happiness, true happiness, is the person who does not follow the increasing declension of the ungodly, but the child of God who delights in the Word of God, and who reads the Word. But he does not read it just to get through it. He reads it so that he can meditate on it. And what will be the result? See verse 3.

“He shall be like a tree,” which speaks of stability and growth and maturity, “which brings forth his fruit in his season.” Fruit can mean the fruit of the Spirit, godly character. But Dawson Trotman who founded The Navigators used to say that “the fruit of a Christian is another Christian. “His leaf also shall not wither.” You can tell by its leaves when a tree is not doing well. Our leaves speak of the profession of our lives. “And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

If you and I are not satisfied with our performance as Christians, we need to pay close attention to Psalm 1.

But what about the ungodly, the person who has no place for God, or for Christ, or the Holy Spirit, or the Bible, in his or her life? The Psalmist said it all when he said, “the ungodly are not so.” The ungodly man may

Psalm 1 (6)

be a very prosperous man with big houses and new cars and be very popular in the world. Or he may be a politician who has been re-elected over and over again. Or a person who has lived his life helping in many social organizations which have improved the living conditions of thousands of people. But he or she has had no place for God in his life, no place for the Bible, no interest in salvation, he is “like the chaff which the wind driveth away.” If you live for time and have not time to think about eternity, and to prepare for it, your loss is impossible to calculate.

You have heard of the person who is always waiting to see which way the wind is blowing. Such a person is chaff according to the Bible.

But now look at verse 5. People may choose to have nothing to do with God now, but the time is coming when they will have to deal with God whether they want to or not. And that time is called “the judgment. And there is a time when there will be a great number of people who have chosen to trust God, to walk in fellowship with Him, and to do His will. There is still time now to join that congregation of God’s people, but there is a time coming which you will no longer have that possibility offered to you.

And the decision then will be the Lord’s. He knows those who have been walking in the way of the righteous. But it can be said now that “the way of the ungodly shall perish.” All of those who have had no time or place for the Lord in this life, face death, eternal death, a never ending death of eternal judgment, separated forever from God and from Christ. There is a heaven, and there is a hell. You may have convinced yourself that such teaching is not true, but if you persist in the way of the ungodly you will learn to late how ominous, and yet how true, is that word “perish.”

Concl: In a few days, the Lord willing, we will begin a new year. How many years has God given us? How much longer you and I have, we do not know. But we know, as the Bible tells us, that “now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). Tomorrow may be too late. And the Bible warns us in these words: “Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Prov. 27:1). If you don’t know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, don’t wait another hour before you put your trust in Him.

For the most of you, let us delight ourselves more and more in the Word of God, reading it, meditating on it, and then obeying what God tells us in His Word that He wants us to do that we may like a fruitful tree which we have read about this morning. May the will of God be done in each of our lives.