

TBC - 7/28/02 p.m.

THE TRULY HAPPY MAN

Psalm 1

Intro: I have probably spoken on Psalm 1 more than any other passage of Scripture either in the OT or the NT. Most of the time I have spoken on it at the beginning of the year. It has been to me a Psalm which points us on the right track as we begin a new year. And since the customary greeting that we give each other at the beginning of the year, is “Happy New Year,” this Psalm points the way to true happiness. In fact, it speaks of the way to a life of *multiplied happinesses!* That word, *happinesses*, is a word which the spell-checker on my computer does not recognize, and yet it is a perfectly legitimate word. In fact, it is the only way that we can properly translate the Hebrew of the word “blessed” in the first verse. I doubt if the plural form was very familiar to the Jewish people. And yet it emphasizes the fact that the happiness which God gives is a happiness that goes beyond anything that the world has to offer. And it is a happiness which can only be experienced by one who knows the Lord, and who is walking with the Lord.

It is a happiness that does not concentrate on certain isolated experiences (although it includes individual events), but it is a happiness that is to be found *as a way of life*. It is a way of life which can only be known by those who are the people of God, and yet I am afraid that there are many who really know the Lord who never experience such a life. It is because too often we are seeking to get the best out of the world (whatever that is) and the best from the Lord, and as a result we are not really happy in either place.

Psalm 1 teaches us that the happy life is a godly life. And when the Scriptures speak of happiness, or true joy, we must not think of it in worldly terms. The writer of the book of Hebrews, in surveying the lives of some of the OT saints, had this to say about Moses in Heb. 11:24-26:

24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

When those verses talk about “the pleasures of sin,” I don’t think that it means that Moses lived a grossly immoral life as a young man, but it just

means that before he knew the Lord had found his enjoyment in the things of the world, not in the things of God. But after he became a child of God he felt that even bearing the “reproach” that he experienced as a child of God, brought him more pleasure than he had been experiencing as a child of the royal family where he had all of the money to do whatever he wanted to do, and to have whatever he wanted to have. He found that the words which the Lord Jesus would speak later were absolutely true when he warned a man who wanted the Lord to intervene with his brother about their inheritance. This is what the Lord said: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). And yet this is what many people feel is “the American dream.” It is the idea that if I can do whatever I want to do, and have whatever I want to have, I will be happy. And yet the people who choose to go that way, if they are perfectly honest, have to admit that they may have found some pleasure in going that way, but it is not the kind of pleasure that remains, and it is often the kind of pleasure that leaves those who go that way with a lot of regrets.

The Psalmist, probably David, began by telling us where true happiness is not to be found. Let me call verse 1

I. A WARNING (Psa. 1:1).

Right at the beginning he identifies the kind of advice and direction that you will get if you listen to the ungodly, to sinners, and to scoffers. An ungodly person is a person who does not pay any attention to God, or to what is pleasing to God. And his counsel is nothing more than worldly wisdom. This does not mean that you necessarily go to him to ask his advice. You can get his counsel just by watching the way he lives. And we are bombarded constantly in the world by the world's ways. And the influence of the world upon us is tremendous.

But this leads to accepting the world's way of life. The Psalmist called it “standing in the way of sinners.” We look at what the people in the world do, and it often looks like a lot of fun, and the first thing we know we are living the way they live. We are doing what they do. We want what they want. And the problem is that we have gotten started in the wrong direction, and we get more and more involved all of the time.

But this is not the end. The next step, and often the final step, is that we find ourselves sitting “in the seat of the scornful.” And so this shows, as

Derek Kidner pointed out in his book on the Psalms, that these are the three steps of departure from the Lord, and conformity to the ways of the world. And he also said that the scorner is the one who is “the most scandalous of sinners” and the one who is the “farthest from repentance.”

What starts out by looking at and listening to the wrong people, brings us to the place where our minds and hearts are set in their opposition to the things of God. And often the person who starts to play with sin, finds himself so enslaved to sin that, even though he is not really happy doing what he is doing, he can't set himself free.

How important it is for all of us to pay attention to the negatives in Scripture! There is that something in all of us that resents being told what we should not do, but that is usually what we need to hear first. At least that seems to be the message of Psalm 1.

But as we move on we come to

II. THE WAY TO TRUE, LASTING, MULTIPLIED HAPPINESS (Psa. 1:2-3).

This is a verse that makes a scoffer laugh. It is a verse that has people saying that such an old book as the Bible doesn't have the truth about happiness in the world today. Have you noticed how prominent the word “today” has become with a lot of Christians? They talk about “today's Christian music,” or “today's Christian radio,” and not we have a translation of the Bible that is called, “Today's New International Version.” This all suggests that what Christians sang yesterday is no longer good for us, or that radio broadcasts have to be changed to keep up with the world's standards, or that even the Bible has to be revised in order to be accepted by the world, or even by Christians. It is amazing how smart we have gotten in the last generation or two.

The Psalmist said, even though even in his day he may have been branded as a fool for saying so, that the Bible holds for us the key to true happiness. The Word of God has always been under attack, and it always will be. But those of us who know the Lord can't afford to listen to people who ridicule “the law of the Lord,” which is a term which speaks of the teaching, the instruction, that we get from all of the Bible as we now have it. The Psalmist said that we not only read it, or hear it explained to us, *but we delight ourselves in it!* We can't keep away from it. We really

Psalm 1 (4)

enjoy. We read it, and we think about what we have read. We ask God to give us greater understanding. We can never get too much of the Word. We start the day with it, and we end the day with it. And this means that during the day, as often as we can, we come back to the Word. This is where we are to get our counsel. This book tells us how to live. And instead of being poisoned with a scornful attitude, we do all we can to encourage others to read it. To delight ourselves in the Word means that we want it. Nobody has to force us to read it. That is what gives us the greatest pleasure – not only reading it, and thinking about it, but using it as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Now we know, or should know, that no one is going to enjoy reading and memorizing and meditating on the Word of God unless his or her heart has been changed. And that change is called in Scripture, salvation! One of the ways you can tell that you have really been saved, is that you have a desire for the Word of God. You don't read it to see if you can find anything wrong with it, but you read it to learn all you can about God, and about the Lord Jesus, and about the Holy Spirit, and also, and this is very important, **WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT YOU!** You want to live a life that is pleasing to God. You want to be the kind of a person that is pleasing to God. And you find it all in this book. It is today's book, just as it was yesterday's book, and it will be tomorrow's book – not "brought up to date," so to speak but just as it was given over a period of some 1600 hundred years.

Remember that the writer of Psalm 119 said, "O how love I Thy law: it is my meditation all the day long" (v. 97).

But what happens to us when we delight ourselves in the Word, reading it over and over, and meditating on it day after day? We become like trees. See what is said in verse 3.

There will be a stability about our lives. We will begin to bear fruit for God's glory. Our leaves shall not wither.

Last year we had a tree planted in our back yard, and I have been noticing the last few days that the leaves are not a rich green color, but they are turning a kind of sick green color, even yellowish. That tells me that there is something wrong with the tree. And I am going to give it some fertilizer this week, and really soak its roots. It is like a Christian who is not delighting in the Word of God.

Paul was concerned about Christians who are like sick trees. Let me read to you what he wrote to the church at Ephesus in Eph. 4:11-16.

So the only way we can be healthy, stable, fruitful Christians, showing outwardly that the life of God is in us, is by delighting ourselves day after day in the Word of God. This was the Psalmist's description of a godly person, one who is really walking with the Lord, learning of Him, and seeking to please him.

But let's go back now and look at

III. THE UNGODLY (Psa. 1:4-5).

How are they getting along? Are they like fruitful trees, stable, and showing signs of life? No! What are they like? "Chaff" – "which the wind driveth away." I like what Kidner said about "chaff." He said it is rootless, weightless, and useless. Delitzsch said the ungodly are
without root below, without fruit above, devoid of all the vigor and freshness of life, lying loose upon the threshing floor and a prey to the slightest breeze, – thus utterly worthless and unstable (I, 87).

And so "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment." According to verse 1 they stand "in the way of sinners," not in the ways of God. They go with the crowd of the ungodly. But what did the Psalmist mean about "judgment." What did he mean? He meant that some day everyone is going to give an account to God of the way he or she has gone here in this life. The person who follows "the counsel of the ungodly" instead of living according to the Word of God, will never be with the righteous, but will have all eternity to regret why the hymn writer called "a wretched choice."

IV. THE TWO WAYS, AND ONLY TWO (Psa. 1:6).

There is "the way of the righteous," which leads to everlasting life. And there is "the way of the ungodly." Sometimes the ungodly like to make it appear that they are on the right way, and they might be able to deceive others in this life. But they need to read those solemn words, "the Lord knows." And He is the One Who ultimately will determine who has walked in "the way of the righteous," and who has walked in "the way of the ungodly," which leads to death – not annihilation, to an eternal hell.

Psalm 1 (6)

Concl: It is significant, isn't it, that this Psalm should come first in the Psalter. How important it is to get started on the right way, and to stay with it. Twice in the book of Proverbs Solomon wrote,

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

"The way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15). And it only leads to death, eternal death. But our Lord Jesus Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

Let me give a closing word to you young people. We all know how the world puts us under pressure to conform. And if you start out the wrong way, the path always leads down and down. But the Lord has given us His Word, not only to tell us what God's way is through Christ, but to assure us that it is the way of manifold blessings, and ultimately it leads us to the very presence of the Lord where there is only "fulness of joy." So read the Bible. Notice how it warns you against sin in any form, and how it points you to Christ and to God and the salvation which really is the only truly happy life there is. Remember as I said to begin with, the truly happy person is the godly person – the one who knows the Lord, and who seeks by the grace of God to live for Him.