

The Truly Happy Man

April 20, 2022

Scripture: Psalms 1:1-6

1. **Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.**
2. **But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.**
3. **And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.**
4. **The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.**
5. **Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.**
6. **For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.**

Summary: What does it mean to be "bless-ED?"

How one becomes truly happy.

Psalm 1

Psalm 1 would fit well in the book of Proverbs, with its didactic tone and its contrast of the righteous and the wicked. It may have been written by Solomon, perhaps as an introduction to his father David's collected songs and prayers. It is not a prayer, as most of the Psalms are. It has no heading, unlike all but a few of the psalms, (2 & 33), telling us who wrote it to whom and why. It is quoted in Jeremiah 17:8, by the way.

A brief overview of Psalm one:

v.1: What the godly man is not,

v.2: What the godly man does,

v.3: What becomes of the godly man,

v.4a: What the ungodly are not,

V.4b-5: What becomes of the ungodly, and

v.6: The Lord's view.

Verse 1 of Psalm 1 gives us the biblical definition of the truly happy man. By the way, "blessed" is a verb, as in "The bishop blessed me," and "blessed" is an adjective, as in "Blessed is the man." The Hebrew word for "blessed" basically means happy, and is related to the word meaning to go straight, to guide or direct. It is almost the same word as the name of Jacob's son Asher.

It is also used in Pr. 9:6, "Forsake the foolish, and live, and walk straight ahead in the way of understanding." It has the same root as the word "walk" in Psalm 1:1. It is a play on words or a pun, with which the Bible is loaded. It means, "blessed is the man," but it sounds like, "Walking straight is the man who doesn't walk in the way of the ungodly," implying that the ungodly walk in a crooked path.

Psalm 1 actually uses the plural of blessed/happy, which is the excellent form, "happiest is the man," or "That man is happiest who does not walk in the advice of the ungodly." You may recall from Pilgrim's Progress that the path Christian was told to stay on was straight, and he was not to diverge from it. When he did, there were always consequences. Hebrews 12:13 helps here, "Make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Each of us in on a journey; what path we take is of great moment. God made His path for His people, but the way of the wicked is hard.

Happiness is first expressed negatively. The happiest man doesn't do certain things. This shouldn't surprise us, since most of the Ten Commandments are negatives too. The happiest man "doesn't walk in the counsel [advice or plans] of the ungodly," meaning he's not going with them, he's not on their path, he has another destination.

Nor does the happiest man "stand in the way of sinners," sinners literally being those who have missed the mark, gone astray like an errant arrow. It's

one thing to meet someone on a journey, but once you stop to stay with him you have ceased from your own journey. Soon you will be not only standing with him and his friends, but sitting with them, becoming comfortable among them, and adopting their mores.

Jesus went among sinners, but He always let them know that there was a difference between their priorities and His. Some loved Him for this, and some hated Him.

The happiest man is then defined positively in verse 2; “His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law does he meditate day and night.” To the happiest man the law is not a restriction on his rights, but a joy. It is instruction in God’s word that brings wisdom, and therefore blessings. Pondering the law, meditating on all its implications in every circumstance, produces a unique and unconquerable happiness, joy, with its own secret source of nourishment and strength.

Not to belittle God’s law, but it is nothing if not His advice. The law is God’s advice to man, over against the sinner’s counsel or advice. The “law” referred to here is more than the Ten Commandments, and is not confined merely to the writings of Moses. I refer you to John 10:33,34: “The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, “You are gods”’?”

Jesus was quoting Psalm 82:6, not Moses, and the Pharisees didn’t correct Him. The Psalms are in some sense God’s law for us too. After all, what has God said that we may ignore? The whole counsel of God is what we should think of when we hear the term, “law of God.”

The happiest man will be like a tree planted by a river, verse 3. Even if there is no rain, no visible comfort or supply, there is a constant source of refreshment through this tree’s taproot. This tree will bring forth fruit and greenery, whereas those trees dependent upon rain – visible circumstances – will produce nothing and wither when visible conditions take a turn for the worse, like in a drought.

The ungodly are chaff (joke), verse 4, they have no substance. God has no use for them. They blow away with the wind, and amount to nothing. This is a vivid illustration for farm people. The wheat husks were brought to the

threshing floor, and beaten with sticks. This cracked the husk open and peeled off the outer shell or chaff. Fans were used to blow away the chaff and separate it from the precious wheat. The chaff is useless, and must be separated from the wheat if the wheat is going to be useful.

The kernel of wheat is glorified; it is turned into bread! But not before being cut down, beaten, ground, and cooked. It is no accident that we don't eat hands full of coarse wheat in the Eucharist, but glorified wheat, bread, which is sacramentally the glorified, perfect humanity of our Lord. The bread is as different from the kernels of wheat as our present condition is from our eternal condition.

Verse 5. The happiest man is he who is wise enough not to stand with the ungodly, verse 1. But here we read that the ungodly will not be able to stand in the judgment. In this life, they may be able to stand in the congregation of the righteous. They may be members in good standing in churches, even ministers, and maybe even bishops. They may fool some people, including themselves, but they cannot fool God. Judgment is passed on the chaff according to its own nature. The ungodly will be unable to stay with the "wheat" on the final day of separation.

Then we come to the heart of the issue; "The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish," verse 6. I find it very interesting the way God expresses Himself here. He "knows" the righteous, implying that He doesn't know the ungodly, but that doesn't mean that the lawless have escaped His notice.

No, He knows about them; He knows every detail of their lives; but they are strangers to His covenant, they don't know Him. They have never made His acquaintance. I know of many of the children in the neighborhood, but I only really know my own children. It reminds me of Jesus' words in Mt. 7:22: "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

When it says "He knows the way of the righteous," it means that He cares for them. He directs the paths of the righteous, He guides the righteous with His eyes, meaning they are keyed in to His most subtle instructions. They are His faithful subjects and obey Him. We come to know Him though His law, His

word, upon which we meditate. (Literally, by the way, meaning “to mutter,” or “to read half-aloud.”)

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Those who do not order their affairs according to His word have no communion with Him; they cannot know Him because the only place to learn the specifics of His will for mankind is in His word. They are in that sense what we used to call, “moral imbeciles.” They are bereaved of the knowledge of God, and are not spending their lives preparing to meet Him. Their words and deeds are not inconsistent with their neglect of the things of God.

Finally Psalm 1 talks about the future: it’s prophetic. When some think of prophecy they think of specific predictions of the future, but that is a gross over-simplification. It isn’t always particular events that are predicted by prophecy; it is often states of being.

The prophets did little else but preach sermons from Moses, and therefore the prophets are largely interpreters of Moses’ ethics. Defining someone in terms of Moses’ ethics allows us to predict his future estate - he will either enter Paradise or perish. That is the sense in which Psalm 1 is prophetic, and that is the sense in which you are a prophet when you tell someone that unless he repents and asks God for mercy in the name of Jesus Christ he will perish. You are predicting his future, in general terms.

But a prophet must take his own advice to be a truly happy man.

So meditate on God’s word day and night, and use it as the standard for your behavior, and the company you keep.