

The Joy of Knowing God

Good morning! This morning I invite you to open up your Bibles to the book of Psalms. That is in the Old Testament. I was told as a boy that if you open up the Bible about halfway, you'll be somewhere in or around the book of Psalms, so if you're trying to find it, maybe that will help. Anyway, we will be in Psalm chapter 1 today. Psalm chapter 1. The very first Psalm in the book.

Now, we read the book of Psalms a lot, don't we? We read it when we need something quick to read from the Word. We read it when we don't know what to read in our Bibles. Perhaps we read it after finishing one book of the Bible as we're searching for another. We read the book of Psalms a lot, don't we? But do we really read it?

In all of those examples I just gave, the book of Psalms is treated as a filler. As an appetizer, but not the main course. I fear that we all too often treat the book of Psalms as though it isn't really Scripture. We would never say that, but we often treat it as an intermediate book and not one worth our devotional study. Now, of course I am not opposed to us reading the book of Psalms whenever we can. There is not anything wrong with reading the Bible after all, and it's best just that we read it, of course. But perhaps we treat the Psalms more like a five minute, read it quick devotional before work instead of the authoritative, instructive wisdom and Word of God that it is that saves, sanctifies, and reveals the glory of Jesus Christ.

So that is going to be one of our goals this morning, is to see the glory of Jesus Christ in this passage as revealed in Psalm chapter one. So with that, let's read our passage for this morning.

This is God's Word to you and me today:

Psalm 1:

1 Blessed is the man

**who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;**

**2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

**3 He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.**

In all that he does, he prospers.

**4 The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.**

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,

**nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

PRAY

Now the very first word of this passage alerts us to the topic at hand. That first word, “blessed,” as many of our translations say, could also be rendered as the word, “happy.” Happiness. Joy. Delight. Contentment in the grace of God. Happiness is a primary theme in this passage.

I just want to take a moment to marvel at that with you - aren't the Scriptures just so pertinent to us? Who does not want happiness? Who doesn't want joy? Isn't that something all of us seek in some manner, shape or form? And yet, it is so fleeting, and hard to grasp at times, isn't it? We all want to be happy. So let's jump right into verse one.

**1 Blessed is the man (happy is the man - who what?)
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,**

This brings us to point number one: Happiness is not found in listening to the world.

The blessed man, the happy man, does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. He does not listen to the instruction of the world. The world offers many messages, none of which can satisfy or truly delight the soul of man, because not one of those messages uttered is from God. The world, as the Bible describes it, is darkened in its understanding of things spiritual, and if it is darkened to things spiritual, there will be no clear or concise message of joy emanating from all the voices we hear in it. How could there be? You need not look far; turn on your phone or your TV. We live in a confused world.

Now, it is easy to look out of our window and say what an awful world, but that is not my aim or intention in any way. This passage is not an examination of the world, but an examination of ourselves. If blessedness is derived not from listening to the world, then we must examine ourselves for any ways in which we are too gripped by earthly messages. In what ways does the world entice us? In what ways do we listen to it far too much? I don't know about you, but I tend to find myself slow to take up my Bible but fast at taking up my phone. Why is it that out of all the voices we would wish to hear upon our waking moments of the day, that it would not be the tender and loving voice of God in his Word, but the ding of a notification? Or the scroll through the news? Or the TV speakers blasting the latest happenings? I believe our priorities in our lives ought to be reordered a bit. Whose word do we listen to first in our day? Whose word do we listen to most? Have you heard the Lord Jesus speak to you today? He is speaking. And his voice is right in your hands, bound in paper and ink. What if we read our Bibles before our phones in the morning? I think the Psalmist may have been onto something. Perhaps we'd be much happier. After all, our passage indicates that the joyful person, the blessed person, is not one who obeys the voice of this world.

I think of an often unsung verse of the old hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross:"

*"His dying Crimson, like a Robe,
Spreads o'er his Body on the Tree;
Then I am dead to all the Globe,
And all the Globe is dead to me."*

Let's continue in our passage. Verse 1

**1 Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,**

Point number two: Happiness is not found in sin.

The Psalmist says that sin does not produce blessedness; that there is no happiness to be found in sinning against the Lord. Now this is quite contrary to what we might hear around us. Everywhere around us, there are enticements to sin against the Lord. In fact many might even proclaim their sin as being liberating, as who they are. But the Scriptures give a different definition of liberation:

Romans 6:16-23

16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To sin is not liberation but harm upon ourselves. What is its fruit? Death is its fruit. That is what is born from sin. As James 1:14-15 says,

14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

To think that sin will satisfy us eternally is to be far too easily pleased. We must not coddle sin. We must not comfort it. We must kill it. Rid ourselves of its cruel grasp upon the affections and mind. There is no reason to defend that which aims to destroy us. So abandon the sin that clings so closely, and throw yourself upon Christ for cleansing. Furthermore, we ought to consider that whatever our hearts are clinging to that is not Christ, that whatever it is does not love you like Jesus does. I don't know about you, but I am so thankful that Jesus sets people free from sin, that he set me free from sin. Jesus is a far better master to me than my sin is.

So to my fellow brothers and sisters, perhaps a good question for ourselves is this: what sins are present in my heart today that would be offensive to our God and inhibit the happiness that I might rather find in holiness? What sins are present in my heart today that would be offensive to our God and inhibit the happiness that I might rather find in holiness? The sins that come to mind that would be especially difficult to part with, that very thing is the thing that must go immediately. We ought to go to the Lord and ask him to show us any error of our ways, and then, we ought to ask him to remove it. For what could you or I do to stop sinning? It must be thoroughly a work of the Holy Spirit. So we should ask him these things. Because that is where joy is, that is where happiness is, is being renewed each day, day by day, and beginning to desire the things God does, and beginning to hate the things God hates.

Point number three: Happiness is not found in self.

Let's finish our first verse...

**1 Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;**

Someone who scoffs at another, whether they scoff at man or at God or his Word, someone who is a scoffer is one who thinks low of others. They consider themselves to be the wiser. Whatever they are scoffing at is, in their minds, worthy of scorn and contempt, and ought to be considered foolish, silly, and unimportant.

In short, a scoffer is one who trusts in his own opinions and is prideful enough to consider others' as entirely absurd. To put it simply, the god that the scoffer worships is himself. He thinks himself to be the highest and best that there is. He considers what he says and thinks to be the truth, and nothing else. He belittles all else save himself.

This type of self centeredness has crept into our Christian circles unknowingly. Sadly, I've heard this expression, or read it, even in Christian contexts; have you ever heard someone say,

“You are enough?” Even if a brother or a sister means well, I cannot think of something more unchristian to tell someone. It is an absurdly unchristian idea, that within myself is somehow the answer to my problems. Not to mention the great irony that if I truly was enough, then I wouldn’t be in the place that I am, would I?

You are not enough, but Jesus Christ, he is! Jesus is enough. Jesus is more than enough. Jesus is more than enough to please God. He is more than enough to save you. He is more than enough to sustain you. Where will you find your joy? Will you run to the world? What good would that do? Will you run to your sins? What comfort would you find there? Will you run to yourself? How could you sustain yourself? He is enough. Jesus Christ is enough for you.

Psalm 73:26

**My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.**

Psalm 43:4-5:

**4 Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God [**who is*] my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.**

**5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.**

**Italics added for clarity*

Let us continue on in our passage.

**1 Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

The happy man's delight is in what? The law, meaning the Word of God, the Bible. His delight is in the Word of the Lord. And why would that bring him delight? Because that is where he hears God. That is where he meets him. That is where he finds him. Happiness is not found in the world, happiness is not found in sin, happiness is not found in yourself, but happiness is found in only one Person.

Which brings me to **point number four: Happiness is knowing God.**

God is the greatest joy and delight of our very souls. We were made with the purpose of glorifying God, as Ecclesiastes 12 would say, and if that is true, then the most satisfying thing in life is him. That is why, if you read the old Westminster catechism, the very first question and answer in it is as follows:

“What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

Enjoying God, being happy in God, being blessed by his divine and gracious presence, is intrinsically involved in our very purpose in this life, that ‘chief end’ that the catechism states. But how do we enjoy God? If knowing the Lord is where happiness is found, then how do we get to know him better? How do we grow in this? Isn’t that always such a challenge for us as Christians? We go to church, we attend different ministry events, and yet many of us struggle with the idea of growing in our closeness with the Lord. Fortunately for us, this passage gives us the answer.

**2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

We fill ourselves with God’s Word. Psalm 1 is, in essence, saying, blessedness is found just by being in God’s Word, regularly and frequently. It is so terribly simple. And yet, I fear that we all too often complicate this matter so much. I find that there are three different types of deterrents to consistent and deepening communion with Jesus in his Scriptures.

The first is pride, the second is that we have a tendency to measure spiritual matters in an earthly manner, and the third is neglecting to worship God while we commune with him in his Word.

First, pride. Though all of these deterrents are truly facets of pride, we will first examine the pride of not reading the Bible. Whether we realize it or not, you and I are very prideful. One of the ways that shows is in our neglect of the Word of God. Whether consciously or unconsciously, when we do not make any effort to read it, we are, in effect, acting or assuming as though we do not need it. To not read the Word is to shut our ears and our hearts to the very voice of God in his Scriptures, to the wisdom he gives, to the encouragement he gives, to the profound words of love that we might read and be changed by. The lack of Bible reading in our lives implies a pride of the heart. As Jesus said in Matthew, **“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”**

Second, we have a tendency to measure spiritual matters in an earthly manner. I have sadly heard before, from people who would confess to be Christians, that they did not need to read the Bible, as it was far secondary to their relationship with God. The problem with that is that to read God’s Word is to have a relationship with God! There is no difference or dichotomy between the two. There is an idea in Christian circles that it is very spiritual to be a pastor or a missionary. Or that it is very spiritual to seek signs and wonders. Or that it is very spiritual to have senses and nudges about things. But our Psalm would say that Christian spirituality,

relationship with God, and Christian maturity would actually be grown not from these things but from spending time with God in his Word. To be spiritual looks a lot more like normal life, normal reading, for God desires that true spirituality be normal to us. It is not always a profound experience, but a daily washing. It is simple, not complicated and not outwardly focused. To be spiritual is to be by the book.

Third, and finally, we have a tendency to neglect that communion with God in his Word is worship. What I mean by this is that we go to the Bible as a textbook at times, rather than a holy time of worship. Now, I am not discouraging deeper study into the questions we have that find their answers in Scripture. There are verses and passages that teach us, correct us, and inform us of everything we may ever ask. I am not saying not to study theology; that is something we are terribly lacking in today. But even theological study, when properly done, is a time of deep communion with God. We lose something deeply important when Bible reading becomes more of an intellectual exercise for our mind than the nourishing and lovely communion and worship with our King and Friend, that it is. Do you read the Bible for the sake of knowledge only, or because God is there speaking to you? Do you go to merely learn about God or do you go there to meet him?

So pushing these deterrents, these obstacles, aside, how do we know the Lord? As verse two says, we delight in his Word. We meditate on it, meaning we fill ourselves with it.

**2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

And this is not a burden to us. To hear the voice of the One I love, is so sweet. If we are Christ's bride, tell me, what would be burdensome about hearing our husband's voice speak ever so kindly to us? Let us see the benefits and beauties of this daily and regular communion with God in his Scriptures, as explained by verse 3:

**3 He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.**

We see in verse 3 that the benefits and joys of regular communion with God in his Word are as follows:

1. God's Word provides spiritual nourishment & sustenance
2. God's Word sanctifies the heart
3. God's Word seasons our lives with grace, joy, and contentment

The first benefit and joy, that God's Word provides spiritual nourishment & sustenance, is seen in how the happy man is described as a tree planted by streams of water. This indicates

that the tree would be well fed and nourished, and have an endless supply of nourishment. This, in turn, produces the strength and steadiness, whereby **“its leaf does not wither.”** Our souls need sustenance, just as our bodies do. And we can find an endless feast in God’s Word, of every delicacy imaginable. The table is set - take your pick. Will it be Genesis? Exodus? Leviticus? Psalms? Kings? Acts? Romans? Matthew? Mark? Luke? Revelation? Jude? Obadiah? Micah? What will you feed your soul today? This is the book for all of our needs. And we need it more than we realize. Of course the happy man would be the one to read God’s Word, for it is happy to hear the promises, that **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** Romans 8:1. That the **“Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,”** that he takes pleasure in me, Psalm 147:11. That **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost,”** 1 Timothy 1:15. Tell me, which of you does not feel some elation or delight upon those promises? Which of you does not need to know those things? I know I do. I need to know that Jesus loves me. That God never deals wrathfully towards his children, but only mercifully. That God is big and that I am small. I need these things. And some of you may sit there and think, “Why do I need such things?” To which I would say, “Because you need God.” And if you still think yourself as not needing him, then you do not know what you need. Which of you does not need to hear his promises? Which one of you does not need to be reminded? Without such food for our souls, we would be starving, despairing, sad, and longing. But God has not left us so. He has given us all we need in his Word. So read it and be filled. This is the first benefit.

The second is that God’s Word sanctifies the heart. We see this in that the tree planted firmly by the water **“yields its fruit.”** Fruit in the Scriptures regularly pertains to the natural product of the Christian life - good works as a result of the internal change within our hearts. Notice that the fruit is not produced before the tree is planted by the stream. Nor is the fruit produced so that the tree may drink of the water. The stream, the delight of God, must feed the tree in order that fruit might grow. So it is with sanctification. Sanctification is one of the saving works of Jesus; it is the process by which the Holy Spirit is transforming and conforming our hearts to that of our Lord Jesus’. And from that lifelong process of continual sanctification comes fruit, good works, transformed desires and redeemed thoughts. One of the means by which the Spirit uses to sanctify his people is with his Word. Jesus informs us of this in John 17:17 as he prays to the Father and asks: **“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”** It is clear, then, that one of the great benefits and joys of spending regular time in God’s Word is that you are being washed in the truth of God.

The third and final joy and benefit of regular communion with God in his Word is that God’s Word seasons our lives with grace, joy, and contentment. Notice that it is said of this happy man, that **“...in all that he does, he prospers.”** Prospers cannot mean an easy life. We know from the Scriptures, along with experience, that life is not easy for most, and that for God’s people, suffering is to be expected and intended by God as a means through which the Lord would humble us and draw us towards him. We are often subject to many sorrows and hardships that leave us fragile and broken. When the passage says the man prospers, it has little to do with an easy life, but much to do with a contented life. A graceful life. A joyful one.

That in all the happy man does, even if he is depressed and dejected, that he has a joy in the Lord. And he does well to have that joy.

Please understand that as I speak today on happiness, I am well aware that many of you may find happiness to be distant and nowhere in sight. I have had my share of such seasons, too. And I can look back at how each came as a kindness from God. And even in a normal week, I believe many of us may experience the highs and lows of emotion. There are severe sadnesses in our lives. But may I ask, even to you, who may be in such a lowly place, are you not glad that Jesus loves you and has died for your sins? That he chose you before the foundations of the earth were made, as Ephesians states? Though we experience sorrow, for the Christian, there is always joy in our Lord. Perhaps that's one of the most confusing parts of being a Christian, figuring out how to be sad and happy at the same time. I think Paul captured it well when he said this in **2 Corinthians 12:9–10**: “...he said to me, ‘**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**’ **Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**” All that the happy man does, whether in good times or bad, is seasoned with grace, peace, and joy, for his happiness is not derived from his earthly circumstances but from his eternal God.

Let's finish our passage. Verse 4.

**4 The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.**

**5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;**

**6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

Our passage ends with a sudden shift in direction. We have examined the blessed man for the first three verses, but now we are presented with the outcome of the opposite, the wicked man. Isn't it interesting how this passage presents that the opposite of a happy man is someone in unrepentant sin, a wicked man? The message is then clear - though sin might give its momentary pleasures, it promises much and delivers nothing. A life that is not in the loving arms of God is one that is vain, and blown away in the wind. It will crumble before him in judgment. And it will not taste the friendship of God's people. Again, the message is clear - you will not have eternal enjoyment apart from Jesus Christ.

But of course, if we are honest, we will recognize that we are sinners. Romans says this:

10 as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

11 no one understands;

**no one seeks for God.
12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.”**

This of course presents a dilemma before us in this Psalm. How could we be righteous before God? How could we be holy? How would we not perish?

This brings us to our last point: Christ is our justification.

What is justification? Justification is another saving work of God in which he declares the sinner to be forgiven of his sins, because those sins were placed upon Christ. Justification is also then the declaration that that sinner is righteous in the sight of God, not because he is intrinsically righteous or has a righteousness of his own, but because Jesus' righteousness was given to him. Jesus' righteousness covers that person. In short, justification is forgiveness. And it's Jesus covering us in his glorious robes of beautiful righteousness, that God would turn his wrath away from us so that we might only ever taste his mercy. The Bible talks about this doctrine in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Now why does this matter? Why do I bring it up? Why the theological mumbo jumbo? Because it matters. We don't really talk about these things a whole lot, but they really matter.

I remember a friend of mine ministering to me one time. I was deeply depressed by past sins I had committed, things I am now ashamed of. Perhaps you know that feeling. The weight of it is crushing. Distressed, I reached out to my friend and explained my sense of pain and guilt over what I had done, how I was feeling overwhelmed. He replied so simply with this: "Christ is your justification, brother. Christ is your justification." And that has stuck with me ever since. Christ is your justification. He himself, and he alone is who declares me as righteous before God. I cannot produce that from myself. Christ is your justification, brother.

And so if you're a sinner this morning, you're in the right place. Jesus came, not for the righteous, but for sinners. There is no better news than that. Jesus Christ came, not for the righteous, but for the sinners. And if you are in Christ, you will stand in the congregation of the righteous, as this Psalm says, but not your own righteousness, but the righteousness that Jesus gave to you! As the old hymn says,

*“My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device nor creed;
I trust the Ever-living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.*

*I need no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me."*

I can understand now, why this man in the Psalm is happy. God is his righteousness. And so I must ask you - is Christ your justification this morning?

Let's pray.