

Psalm 1
Blessedness of the Godly man

Introduction

This psalm has been described as an introduction to the whole Psalter. Basil (330-379), one of great early fathers, and bishop of Caesarea, said that what a foundation is to a house, what a keel is to a ship, what a heart is to an animal, that is what this Psalm is to the whole book. Indeed we can go further, for it sums up the whole of Scripture, dealing with the happiness of the godly, and the unhappiness of the ungodly.

Who wrote it is unknown. Two leading candidates are David and Ezra, though we know nothing of Ezra as a poet.

Emphasises that he alone is blessed who belongs to God and lives for God. “Blessed” – the Hebrew word means “Happy”, “O the happiness of...” cf. Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:8) **How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom.** Used 26 times in the book of Psalms. **Blessed are all who take refuge in him (2:12). Blessed are those who dwell in your house (84:4).** New Testament word equivalent μακάριος used in Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-12).

There are two sides to blessedness – this is frequently forgotten. Too often we hear “Always be positive, never negative, never say anything that’s wrong, or that we should not do something”. But Bible constantly stresses negative. Discipleship – not only going Christ’s way, but also refusing to go self’s way; not only enthroning Christ, but also dethroning self; not only following Christ, but also denying self.

So in this psalm we see separation from world as well as dedication to God. **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2).** Paul says the negative as well as positive to be preached and practiced – living by one without the other ends in frustration and disappointment and failure. So in this Psalm, we are exhorted to turn back on certain things, turning face in opposite direction. Avoid this but cultivate that. Cannot run with the hare, and hunt with the hounds. Need to take foot off the brake as well as put it on the accelerator.

Negative Side of Godly Life

Ungodly are described in three ways in v1:

- (1) **Wicked** AV=ungodly. God has no place in life, not stable, no foundation to life, no moral standards, like a storm-tossed sea.
- (2) **Sinners** Person who lives in sin, no place for God and his will. Especially marked by coarse sin.
- (3) **Mockers** who ridicule, mock, sneer at God, the Bible and his people. Turn holy and sacred things into a joke.

They are godless, rebellious and contemptuous. No doubt we could each think of certain people whose outlook is perfectly described by each of these three words. Do not let them influence you. In three ways:

- (1) **Do not walk in the counsel of the wicked.** Do not let your mind be influenced by their advice, opinions, practices, aims.
- (2) Do not **stand in the way of sinners.** Do not seek to be close or intimate with them as companions so that you behave like them.
- (3) Do not **sit in seat of mockers.** Do not belong or teach or advocate what they do. Mockers are the furthest from repentance. Do not be cynics, scoffers, sneerers at divine things, or encourage others to do so.

In short, do not take your cue from the world, do not cultivate friendship with it. This is a warning that the things we think about, the attitude we learn from others, the people we follow and the company we keep, shape the whole of life. Nowadays we are under much pressure. Few live on a desert island. Under pressure from all sides because we are interacting with people in modern life. At work, conversation, sights we cannot avoid, newspaper, TV, we find ourselves facing values, outlooks, standards and talk which are all far from God and his word. Of course we are to be kind, friendly and helpful, but not be influenced. Consider creating a gap and a parting of ways.

Christians are not thick on the ground. Many Christians never meet another for days on end. You may be the only Christian in the home, street, family, workplace, town. Need to support one another and make most of one another's company. Cannot understand Christians who limit contact with others to bare minimum.

Positive side of Godly Life

Napoleon said "To conquer we must replace". Need for counteraction. Evil is to be "crowded out and not barred out". **His delight is in the Law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night** (v2). "Law" has many uses in the Bible. Not just rules in narrow sense. Here it refers to teaching, guidance, total revelation of Lord. Here we are better off than the Psalmist – we have total revelation of Lord in whole of Old Testament and New Testament. **His delight** (not duty or chore, but pleasure, satisfaction, joy) is God's revelation of himself and his ways.

As long as we maintain separation from the world and a tender conscience, and give ourselves wholly to the Lord, our life will be full of delight. Not miserable life. Pleasures in God, his Word, providential dealings with us, times he reveals himself – these things regenerate us and help us overcome downward drag of sin and world. D.L.Moody: "This book will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from this book".

The godly man meditates, just as Joshua was told to meditate on Book of the Law day and night, and to obey it (Joshua 1:8). As a result the godly man will be prosperous and successful. Be careful not to rush through your bible reading, and, as soon as it's over, think of something else. But, rather, think over what you have just read. Consider it. Ask Holy Spirit to show where it applies to life. Carry it in mind throughout the day. Keep coming back to it. Cf. R.M.McCheyne's habit of turning each verse into a prayer. Unless we meditate on Scripture, grace will never thrive,

prayer will be lifeless, praise will be dull and Christian service will be unprofitable. Meditation is essential to spiritual progress and life. **Man does not live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God** (Matthew 4:4).

Many causes for concern in Christian church at present in this land – standard of preaching, ignorance of basic Christian truth, irreverence, light-heartedness, half-heartedness, lack of separation. But most alarming is the serious decline in daily Bible reading, and with that goes any real meaningful and effective prayer. And to push this further – even where Bible is read, how often is it meditated on?

Fruit of the Godly Life

He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither (v3). Like a tree on river-bank is fruitful, leaf does not wither and die from lack of water. Never affected by drought. When all around is burnt up by heat, trees by water courses in Eastern countries remain fresh and green. So with the man of God, nourished by the Word, leading to a life of spiritual fruitfulness. Real results in inner life and outer life. See it in holy and righteous living. The fruits of the Spirit abound. Work for God is blessed. God is glorified and neighbours blessed. **The righteous... are planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green** (Psalm 92:13-14).

Whatever he does prospers (v3). Once thought this did not apply to material prosperity, but not so sure now. Certainly unlike Old Testament – blessings in New Testament are mainly spiritual and not material – but material blessings are not excluded. Believers do prosper materially because they are believers.

Dr A. MacLaren, sermon quote: “Roman Catholic priest will start to visit his flock in slums and will continue to visit them in slums to end of their lives. Free church minister may start to visit flock in slums but will not continue to do so till end of lives”. Regret of minister in church on housing estate in Newcastle, that converts did not stay on estate to help him build up church. Soon leave and go to better area. Reason is that conversion led to new self respect, not waste money and give it all to brewers and bookies, work hard, prosper, concerned with environment for children to grow up in. Want best for them. Bound to prosper and get on.

Same in intellectual world. Friend of R.M.McCheyne told at London Bible College to aim for a degree despite lack of qualifications. “We have noticed that people who become Christians have a habit of passing examinations.” G.S.Gordon (in book “Quiet Talks on Power” p.186): conversion means man’s faculties are developed to highest pitch, highest peak of effectiveness, and develops new motivation. Brain is sharpened, will is steadier. Civil engineers are more accurate. Lawyer more thorough. Business man more alert. Not that they have new mental powers, but what mental powers there are, are brought to highest pitch. Results will be in proportion as man yields self to control of indwelling Holy Spirit. Machine works best when running under inventor’s immediate direction.

This is in marked contrast to the ungodly. **They are like chaff that the wind blows away** (v4). Weightless, empty, restless. Cf. winnowing in Palestine, threshed corn is

tossed up, husks and fragments are blown away. Only grain is left behind. Ungodly, for all their wealth, power, possessions, pomp and pride, are empty, shallow, light, without foundation. Their interests, what they laugh at, get excited about, talk about – childish, trivial, empty. Exploits of local football team are the most important concern in lives of quite intelligent people. Even when people do talk about serious things, whole dimension of life and experience you cannot share with them. Their range is so limited, they are very narrow-minded. And they **will not stand in the judgement** (v5). Not have leg to stand on. No case to plead. Lives built on sand, and not on rock. Tares and wheat grow together till harvest, then a final separation. Broken law of God repeatedly. Guilt. In folly and blindness in rejecting Christ, rejected offer of free pardon so dearly bought for them by Christ. Neither **will sinners stand in the assembly of the righteous**. Complete and eternal separation.

Summary of Psalmist's Argument

The Lord watches over the way of the righteous (v6). The Hebrew word used here is better translated “The Lord knows” as in the AV, because it is wider than just “watches over”. Includes approves, loves, deals mercifully with, causes goodness and mercy to follow, identifies himself with. Even in this very imperfect and suffering world, God's people have real blessedness that is solid, genuine and enduring. Not complete because that awaits death and Christ's return with associated events. But real and solid. Caused men to say – even if no life after death and heaven with God, still most worthwhile thing in world to be a Christian.

But the way of wicked will perish (v6). Sad plight to be without God in life, in death and in eternity. Life is empty, meaningless, pointless, faced with total ruin. On road whose end is destruction. Exact opposite of eternal life. No way of escape. No solid ground beneath feet in life and no hope in death and judgement. As we sow, so we reap.

World may pity us as Christians. This need not bother us, it is they who need our pity. Cf. words to church at Laodicea, which are also applicable here: **You say I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked** (Revelation 3:17).

So two ends are set before men, one ends in God himself, the other ends in darkest night.

Conclusion

The Psalm presents negative side of godly life, positive side of godly life, and the fruit which ensues from godly life. And in the shadows is also the grim reality of ungodly life. Put in sharpest contrast – as in rest of Bible. No neutral third course. One side or other, friend of God, or his foe.

Great business of every man's life is to examine selves to see where we stand.