

Date: 4.5.0.8
Text: Psalm 1
Title: Two Ways to Live
Place: Kingscliff Tweed AM/PM
File: Psalm 1

Introduction

Music is everywhere we go today, isn't it? We listen to it in the car, it plays in the shopping centres, it always seems to be on at home, it is the soundtrack to our favourite TV shows or movies, we hear it as we exercise outside, why even elevators have it playing gently in the background. It is everywhere.

So, what radio station did the ancient Jews listen to? None! Radios were not invented back then. But music was a very central part of their lives, as well. And in our reading through the Bible, we have come to their songbook: the Psalms. The Psalms were sung by the Jews throughout the day.

When they were happy, they would sing a Psalm of Praise. When they were thankful, they would sing a Psalm of thanksgiving. When they were sad, they would sing a psalm of lament. And when they were unsure, they would sing a Psalm of wisdom. You see the Psalms covered every aspect of life that was important. And they were sung in the Temple for worship, but they were also sung by the Jews in their homes, at their workplaces, when they gathered together.

For singing and music is important, it has always been important to us humans. But have you noticed we sing about what we think is important. So today's pop music is all about love and sex and money. Today's rap music is about lust and rebellion and striking back. And today's modern Church music is often about praise and worship and blessings. For we sing about what we consider to be important.

But the Psalms are about all of life, not just the bits of life that we like. They are about all our emotions, not just some of our emotions. They are about all the characteristics of God, not just the ones that are trendy and acceptable. And because of this, God's people keep on coming back to the Psalms, because it is the sound track of our lives.

Did you know for example that the Psalms are quoted more times by the writers of the NT than any other OT book? Did you know that in the past the Psalter was often the only songbook that Churches used? Did you know that many of the hymns we sing today take their themes and many of their words straight from this book?

One of the early church fathers, St. Basil, wrote that "they are like a general hospital for souls where we might each select the medicine for our own disease." And John Calvin said, "no one will find in himself a single feeling of which the image is not reflected in the mirror of the Psalms."

So over the next few weeks we are going to look at some of the Psalms. Not all of them for there are 150 in total, but some different ones. So that we can have a taste so to speak and having our appetite whetted, so, hopefully then we all will go home and start reading them and praying through them and singing them to ourselves and using them like generations of Christians have before us.

But today we are going to start with Psalm 1, what someone has called the gate keeper to the rest of the book of Psalms. It's a wisdom Psalm, a teaching Psalm, one that we are meant to sing and ponder again and again and it is all about choices.

We have choices almost every minute of every day, don't we? What am I going to wear? How am I going to do my hair? How will I treat people? What attitude will I take to work? But Psalm 1 is about the most important Choice we have in life? Am I going to walk down the path of life or death? Am I going to be a righteous woman or a wicked man? Am I going to do with my life something that will please God or not please God? Its about choices?

I remember reading a Far Side cartoon a couple of years back. It was about a man driving a horse float down the road with two horses in the back and as he drove down the road he was coming to a T intersection, so he is going to have choice. To the left was a sign Stud Farm. To the right was the sign Knackery. And one horse turns to the other and says, "Well this could be heaven or it could be hell?"

We all have a choice, that will result in either going to heaven or hell! We all have a decision about which path we are going to travel down. Jesus talked about the two ways -- he called them the wide way and the narrow way (Matthew 7). He talked about how the Son of Man will separate mankind into two groups, putting the sheep on the right hand and the goats on the left (Matthew 25). The Apostle John wrote in his first epistle about those who walk in the light and those who walk in darkness. And here in Psalm 1, we find those same two ways described. There is the godly life and there is the ungodly life. And, every one of us finds ourselves in one of those two categories. So lets look at the choices we have.

1. Two Men.

Because the Psalm describes two men, two women, two people. The man who is righteous, who is right with God and the man who is wicked, who is still filled with sin.

Now did you notice that, there are just two men? Not three or four, but two. So there is no sitting on the fence, there is no one in between, there is no half and half, for this Psalm divides the world into two men. Now how would you divide the world if you had just two categories - rich and poor, young and old, married and single, employed and unemployed, black and white? All of those division are real, but God when he looks down at our world divides us into the righteous and the wicked.

Now the problem with that is that most of us wouldn't see ourselves in either of those two terms. If you are like me and were one day to have a good look at yourself, you have to honestly say, I'm not really righteous, but I wouldn't really describe myself as wicked either. I'm somewhere in between. But the problem with that is that we are looking at things through our own eyes and not through God's eyes.

God looks out at his world and he doesn't see black and white, rich and poor, young and old, he divides all people into righteous and wicked. Well how are we going to determine which side we are on?

2. Two men, two ways.

Well we need to look at the two ways portrayed by this Psalm. So lets do that, starting firstly with the righteous man, and we see him in verse 1 as what he doesn't do.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

The righteous man doesn't take the progression from walking to standing to sitting. He does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, he doesn't listen to the what the wicked are saying. He doesn't fill his thoughts and his mind with the stuff that is going to help him make wrong decisions. He doesn't accept the world's advice.

And then he doesn't take the next step and stand in the way of sinners. He doesn't identify himself with sin. He doesn't join their gangs or fellowship in their ways. And then he doesn't sit in the seat of mockers, he doesn't scoff at those seeking to follow God, he doesn't belittle those who are trying to do God's work. The righteous man doesn't progress from "walking" to "standing" to "sitting"

You see, a person, and especially a Christian, doesn't usually jump right into the middle of sin. Usually it goes in stages. He starts out by walking along with the wicked. Pretty soon, he finds himself standing in their midst, and then it's not too long before he sitting down with them.

It's like Lot. Remember when he and Abraham separated (Genesis 13)? They stood on the mountain overlooking the land, and Abraham said, "Choose which side you want. If you go east, I'll go west. If you go west, I'll go east." So Lot looked out and he saw how green it was to the west and he chose that way. He took no thought as to what would be best for him spiritually. He was looking at it strictly from a physical point of view.

The next thing we know, Lot "dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom." (Genesis 13:12). He gets closer and closer until by the time we get to Genesis 19 we find him living in the midst of the immorality and sin of that city.

But the righteous are careful with the company they keep. Now that doesn't mean that if we want to be righteous we withdraw from the world into our own holy huddle, we busy ourselves with Church people and Church business and never have time with any non Christian friends and family. No, the rest of the Bible is pretty clear that is not what the Psalmist is talking about.

What it is saying is that what we put into our minds is important, because thinking leads to actions. And who we hang around with is important, because company affect character. And whom we belong to is important, because their world view is going to shape what you eventually do and say.

The poet put it this way,

*Sow a thought, and you reap an act; Sow an act, and you reap a habit;
Sow a habit, and you reap a character; Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.*

So the righteous person will not be influenced by the world, instead they will be influenced by the word. Look at verse 2, “*But his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.*” They will value, they will delight, they will listen not to the sinners or the scoffers, but to the Scriptures. They will read it, they will ponder it, they will meditate on it. For they want to have God’s ways inside of them, so they will always know what God’s will for them will be.

And the picture here of meditating is that of the cow. It pictures a cow chewing on her cud. I’m told that the cow has four compartments in her stomach. So she can go out in the morning, graze on the grass, when the dew is out in the cool of the day. Then when it gets hot in the middle of the day, she lies down under a tree and begins to chew the cud. She moves the grass she had in the morning back up and goes over it again and again.

And that is what we do when we meditate. We go over God’s word again and again. We read it at the beginning of the day. We ponder its meaning as we drive in the car. We think about it as we wait in the queue at the shopping centre or at the bank. We apply it to our lives as we mow the grass. And we ponder what we did with it as we lie in bed at the end of the day.

The righteous do that, and so they become *like a tree planted by the streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.* They have stability in their life because they have their roots deep into the good soil of the ways of God. They have growth because the things that are going to encourage their righteousness is always before them. They have fruit because the positive nutrients are entering their system and producing things that will benefit those around them. And they have perseverance, even the tough times will not curb their growth because they have effectively drought proofed their lives, by filling it with the word of God.

So there are two people, the righteous and the wicked. Two ways we are either situated in the world or saturated with the Word. And thirdly there are

3. Two Destinies.

The first way, the way of righteousness leads to happiness and blessedness. Christians are not rowers, who have no fun. Followers of God are not those with a permanent frown on their face because they miss out on all the cool stuff like drinking, smoking gambling, sex and fun. No we are living the way that we were made to live. We are following life according to our maker’s instructions and that leads to joy, to peace, to patience, to fulfilment. Not only for ourselves but for those around us.

For as preacher John Piper once put it, The righteous “are refreshing and nourishing to be around. You go away from them fed. You go away strengthened. You go away with your taste for spiritual things awakened. Their words are healing and convicting and encouraging and deepening and enlightening. Being around them is like a meal, a good meal where you come away full.”

Why is that? Because according to the Psalm, God watches over them. God is with them. God is going before them. They are not battling against whatever life throws them on their own. They have the King of the world at their side, helping them to

handle the good, the bad and the ugly.

But the wicked are not like that. They are like the chaff that the wind blows away. What is chaff? Well, chaff is what you get when you take a piece of wheat and roll it in your hands. The chaff is the dry, useless part that blows away. It's completely worthless. It has no substance. And those who have not lived lives of substance, those who have walked with the wicked, stood with the sinners, sat with the scoffer haven't done the things that have pleased their Maker, their Creator, their God.

And so they will not stand on the day of judgement. They instead will perish. What they thought was life, has led to death. What they was fulfilling, has turned out empty. What they thought was fun was fundamentally flawed. Because in the end, all that they achieved in this life was chaff, it was useless, it has blown away. And the blessing they thought was theirs is given to the righteous.

It was Robert Frost, the great American poet who wrote: *"Two roads diverged in a wood and sorry I could not travel both....I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference."* The way of the wicked is the highway where most of our culture is roaring down at a million miles an hour. The Psalm reminds us that we are called to take the road less travelled, to jump off the bandwagon and go down the path of righteousness and that will make all the difference.

So which path are you on? The road of the righteous or the way of the wicked? Whose advice are you putting inside of yourselves, the counsel of the world or the character of the Word? Which destiny awaits you, the blessings of the Blessed one or the judgement of the judge?

Well let me be honest here. Really honest. If I am honest, I'm not on the right road. I may be a Christian, a Presbyterian, a minister, but I have to admit that a lot of what I do in my life is chaff, its useless, its worthless. When I look at God's word I have to put my hand up and say that I am sinner, there is far to much sin in my life. That often my actions are wicked, I do lie and manipulate and are constantly selfish. I too mock and scoff at those around me, without walking a mile in their shoes. And so what I am doing in my life deserves judgement.

Are you any different, if you are really honest? You see this Psalm, for us, is not a pat on the back for us, it is not a well done good and faithful servant. It is something that stabs me in the back, condemns me, shakes me to the core. So what on earth am I going to do to become righteous? What can I possible do to avoid perishing?

John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so whoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life."*

Doesn't this Psalm drive us again to Jesus? Wasn't he the righteous man who did not walk in the counsel of the godly nor stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers? No he stood up for the ways of God, he followed the road less travelled, he went to the cross and the grave, he endured the scoffing of the crowd. And wasn't he the one who delighted in the law of the Lord, didn't he withdraw regularly for mediation and prayer with the father. Wasn't he so saturated with the word that he was one who although was called the friend of sinners, also separated himself from

that world of sin?

Isn't he the one this Psalm is pointing toward? And so isn't he the one that gives me hope in the midst of this Psalm? Yes there are two men, two ways, two destinies but ultimately **one God**. And that one God gives me a chance to become righteous not by what I have done, but by what Jesus has done. That one God has given me a chance at forgiveness for my sin, so that I might be able to stand with Jesus in the assembly of the righteous. That one God promises to watch over all my life and so give me the blessings of life to the full in this life and in the life to come, everlasting life.

This Psalm drives me to Jesus. And it makes me weary of listening too much to the TV or the newspaper for the wisdom I need to live life by. It makes me cautious of being numbered with those who are proud of their sinful ways. It warns me not to fill my life with complaints and scoffing and mocking others. But instead I need to delight in the word of the Lord and I need to meditate on it day and night. I need to come to God's word regularly, daily, studiously, consistently, prayerfully. And I need to ponder what Jesus has done for me as walk along the road, as I drive in the car and as I wait for the teller to serve me in the bank. How did the poet put it?

Jesus, help me to be for Thee,
Just like a big, strong, cedar tree;
When all the other trees are bare
The cedar stands so great and fair
The wind and storm, the ice and cold
Make it more beauty to unfold.

So I would stand in trial and test,
Just trusting You to do what's best
Though others fail, Lord, keep Thou me!
May I a cedar Christian be!

PM Service - Colin Buchanan Song "Growing like a tree"

