

Sermon- Psalm 1 (by Joel Grieger)

The address for today is based on the Psalm 1 and I will read a few key verses.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night, 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 he does he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. (Psalm 1- Various verses)

Let us Pray. Lord sanctify us in your truth, your word is truth. AMEN

[B] Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Psalm 1. [P] It sets the scene; it introduces what we expect to see in the other 149 Psalms, just like the opening chapters of other Biblical books set the scene for that particular book. If we take Genesis for example, the first chapter sets the scene through the creation account, which helps us understand the fall and then the re-occurring disobedience after that. The Gospel accounts, they all set the scene for Jesus' ministry in one way or another. Whether it be Matthew through the family tree of Jesus, Mark where John the Baptist prepares the way for the Messiah, Luke where John the Baptist is again in focus, this time an account of his birth. So how does Psalm 1 set the scene? It deals with a major problem in life. It deals with [HG] two potential paths you may take. The way and path of righteousness, which today we would say is a life attuned to God [P] and the way and path of wickedness, or a life lived without God. And these pathway options and themes continue to pop up throughout the rest of the Psalms. These contrasting paths are constantly mentioned throughout the Psalms to guide and teach us about how God wants us to live. A life attuned to God which leads to salvation. A life lived without God which leads to condemnation.

[B] In our Psalm for today, the way of the righteous is described like a tree which is planted by streams of water, whereas the wicked are described as chaff that the wind blows away. So what does a tree planted by water look like? What is the Psalmist implying here in this image?

[P] Friends, The Psalmist talks about people being blessed when they delight in the Law of the Lord. But what does this mean? Does it mean we will be blessed if we do the right thing and obey all of God's Law's? Is that what this Psalm is suggesting here? [T]Actually it's not so straight forward as that. Firstly, we need to understand what the Psalm means by the term "Law" here. In Lutheran theology we have a distinction of Law/Gospel where Law is simply the commands and expectations from God which we always fail to live up to.

An example of this is the 10 commandments or the command from Jesus which we heard last week- love one another.

[Exp] BUT the Hebrew word for Law can also mean God's Word. And that significantly changes the landscape of this Psalm when we understand that we are being encouraged to meditate on God's Word and to trust in his revelation to us. So, what does the blessed person find when they meditate on God's Word, the Bible?

[P] When we read God's Word, we are shown how God needed to intervene because we are all sinners. Human beings failed in the past. We continue to fail in the present. We will continue to fail in the future at living up to God's expectations. And this is where, when we continue to mediate and read God's Word, our eyes are opened to what God has done for us. God's Word shows us our problem- that we are sinners and then after that, God's Word shows us the solution to that problem- Jesus Christ our Saviour. We are able to see what Christ has done for us. We see that we are only righteous, only attuned to a life as God planned it to be, because God has made us righteous. So when we are blessed, it is in the sense that GOD is giving us his blessing, his forgiveness and his acceptance of us.

[B] When we meditate of God's Word, God shows us that we can't bless ourselves. If you need some proof and evidence of this, let's go back to our tree by the water description. 'He or she is like a tree PLANTED, PLANTED by streams of water. [Exp] The tree did not put itself there just as we didn't make ourselves righteous. God put the tree by the water so that it could flourish and produce fruit and in the same way, God makes us righteous so that we can flourish, so that we can produce fruit. Only after he has intervened, only as a response to the grace that he has gifted us through Christ. [T] And how do we learn all these great things about our Lord? By reading and meditating on God's Word.

To be blessed, righteous and attuned to God, is to know God's saving work in Christ. His life and death is the real triumph story in this world and the triumph which Psalm 1 points us to. [T] Now, that is something well worth meditating on and trusting in day and night. So worthwhile is meditating on God's Word it caught the attention of Luther who in the Large Catechism writes.

'Nothing is so powerfully effective against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts as to occupy oneself with God's Word, to speak about it and meditate upon it, in the way that Psalm 1 verse 2 calls us to do'

[P] Friends, these words from Luther give us the template to avoid the ways of the wicked, to avoid being the chaff that blows away in the wind, to avoid the eternal condemnation of the unrighteous. By meditation on God's Word, we can not only see the intervening path of Christ, we can walk on it, we can be renewed internally by it, and ultimately share in the eternal salvation on the last day.

[P] Contrast this path to the other path: the path of a life lived at odds with God, which leads not to life.... but to death: not to the fullness of life and joy....but to emptiness and despair.

[B] I would like to share one concluding thought on Psalm 1. I have talked about the two paths, particularly the path of the righteous or a path where your life attuned to God. In my own personal reflection and meditation on Psalm 1, I could not help but thinking how lucky we are that there are actually two paths, how loved we are by God that there is actually a righteousness path. Because without God's intervention and the righteousness, we received from Jesus, there would only be one path. Jesus is the one who had provided us with the road back home to God. Remember how Jesus in John's Gospel says that he is the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is himself the path we follow!

May you all go out, listening to God's Word, meditate on it which points you to the righteousness you have in Christ. May you all go out knowing you are like a well-watered tree planted by God whose leaves will never wither. Thanks be to God for this wonderful gracious gift. AMEN

Let us Pray. Heavenly Father, thank-you for giving us your Word which points us to the undeserved righteousness we all have in Christ. AMEN