

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE MORNING SERVICE 25 DECEMBER 2013

(Quotations from Scripture: English Standard Version unless indicated otherwise)

Sing before the service: Psalm 1:1-3 (p3)

Prayer: *I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Amen (Psalm 121:1-2)*

Song of praise: Psalm 100:1-3 (p494)

Prayer:

Sing: Psalm 29:1+3 (p135)

Scripture reading: Psalm 1 (ESV)

Text: Psalm 1

Theme: The Righteous man

Reading the Psalms can be a **daunting task**. Not only is the Psalter – or the book of Psalms – the *longest* book in the Bible, but the Psalms are also written in the form of *poetry and songs*. They include all different kinds, ranging from praise and thanksgiving to wisdom and lament. The Psalms can be difficult to understand and how they fit together as a whole is not always immediately clear. *Nevertheless*, a **basic grasp** of Ps. 1 can help a great deal in *orienting* us towards the rest of the book. Some have called Ps. 1 the great entrance way into the mansion of the Psalter.

The Psalter **echoes the Pentateuch** – the first five books of the Bible – in that it too is divided into *five books*. Ps. 1 introduces the first book of the Psalter that runs through Ps. 41. Just like the *first chapter of Proverbs*, the first chapter of Psalms gives us **instruction and wisdom** on how we should relate to God – not God in the abstract, but God as our covenant Lord and Saviour. * Simply put, this Psalm is about **two distinct ways of living**: either living as a righteous person *for* God or living as a wicked person *against* God. Perhaps the best way of **organizing this Psalm** is as follows: **(i)** vv1-2 set forth the two different *sources* of instruction for the two ways of life; **(ii)** vv3-4 describe the contrasting *fruit* produced by each way of life; **(iii)** vv5-6 tell us about the final *outcomes* of the two ways of life.

Instruction in righteousness or wickedness (vv1-2)

In verse 1, we are introduced to the **“blessed” man**. He is the one who walks in the way of righteousness. The Psalmist, most likely David, tells us that the *“blessed” man* – the man who receives reward – is one who does **not take advice** from the wicked. The blessed man is one who does **not stray** from the path of righteousness, even when temptation calls.

A **useful metaphor** for the temptation to sin described in our passage is the allure of the *Woman of Folly* described in Proverbs 9. She stands at the door of her house offering sexual favours to those passing by. Those who get caught in her web of sensual deceit are those who first *“walk”* towards her. Then, **like the progression** we see in Ps 1, the one tempted is drawn away by walking *“in the counsel of the wicked”*: in other words, he starts following her with **interest** and intrigue. And then he *“stands”* with the Woman of Folly. He **listens** to what illicit things she has to say. And then, he **gets comfortable** and *“sits”* in the seat of the

scoffer: the one who mocks God. By this stage, he has become a captive audience to evil and a slave to sin. The *point here* is that temptation to sin – to walk in the way of the wicked – is subtle, but nevertheless powerful and captivating. The descent into hell for the wicked is a **gradual process**. The righteous man knows this and therefore avoids the way of folly.

Are you like the righteous man here? Are you keeping the right company? Are you keeping your eyes to yourself? Are you being careful of who you are listening to? Are you actively fighting against the world, the flesh and the devil?

In verse 2, David writes that the righteousness man or “*blessed man*” is one who, instead of walking in the counsel of the wicked, rather “*delights in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night*”. The reference to the law here probably **brought to mind** for the Israelites: Moses and the giving of the law at Sinai, and Joshua delivering the law again on the edge of the Promised Land. These words would have *reminded* the Israelites of the **great heroes** of the faith and their devotion to God: like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Joshua. With this said, the law spoken of here is also **more than the Torah**, the first five books of the Bible. For us in NT times, the law should be understood to encompass **all the wisdom and instruction** of the Scriptures, including the gospel promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we should **prayerfully meditate** on God’s law – His Word – continually. It is here that we find the way of righteousness; the wisdom that leads to salvation.

Good fruit and bad fruit (vv3-4)

In vv3-4, David uses poetry to paint a picture for us of the different kind of fruit that the righteous and the wicked produce. Notice, again, the striking contrasts. Like a **flourishing fruit tree** planted by life-giving streams of water, so the believer produces the fruit of righteousness by heeding the instruction of God’s Word. Just like a fruit tree needs **fertile ground and water** to grow, so faith needs the covenant Word of God to take root and prosper. Just as a fruit tree **takes time** to grow and bloom, so our faith takes time to mature and prosper. Often there are times when the growth of a tree is slow and even stunted, like during the winter months and during bad weather. Likewise, we must patiently persevere through those times when in our faith is weak and under attack. Often, God allows all sorts of suffering to enter into our lives to test our faith, and as a result strengthen and mature it.

With this said, let us **be careful** that we don’t equate the growth spoken of here with temporary *health, wealth and prosperity*. Yes, Israel enjoyed the **Promised Land** filled with many material blessings. Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey. But we do not live in the times of national Israel in an earthly paradise. Rather, like Abraham, we live as **sojourners and exiles** in this world, exposed to the sufferings of this age. Nevertheless, what the Word does promise is that God is **renewing us inwardly** as new creatures in Christ. God has given us the certain hope of heaven. God will ensure that his church continues to prosper with a prosperity that is largely hidden from a watching world; with a prosperity that is unlike that which the world seeks after.

Nevertheless, God’s blessings are **not entirely unseen and in the future**. Let us not forget that God is pleased to give us a **special foretaste** of heaven when we gather together like this for *corporate worship*, as he serves us through the means of grace. Through the ministry of the Word preached and sacraments administered, God gives us grace from heaven in Christ through his Spirit. This is the chief and **indispensable diet** for our faith as Christians.

It is through the ministry of the Word delivered in corporate worship that God ensures that we **stay on the path** of righteousness and bear much fruit.

In contrast, the psalmist describes the wicked and **haters of God** in the world, verse 4, as *spiritually barren and fruitless*. They are without Christ, his Spirit and his grace. They are like the discarded husks of grain that are blown away in the wind.

Judgment and salvation (vv5-6)

So far we have considered the *distinctly opposing sources of instruction and values* for the righteous and the wicked. These are basically the wisdom of the Word and the wisdom of the world. In vv3-4 we saw the contrasting *fruit* produced by each way of life: good fruit and bad fruit. Now in vv5-6, we learn about the **outcome** of the ways of the wicked and the righteous. In verse 5, David states in no uncertain terms that the **wicked will not endure** God's judgment on the Last Day, and therefore they will not be found in the church. Why? They have turned away from God and his Word of Life.

But, for those who prayerfully heed God's Word and are taught by it; for those who grow and prosper like a fruit-tree through the power of the Holy Spirit, **God promises to save**. David says, God "*knows the way of the righteous*", which means he has set his **covenantal love** upon those of faith, upon his church. He ordained our heavenly destiny even before time began. However, like Israel, we still **wait** for the full realization of our salvation – don't we?

How then can we be **certain** that God's Word of promise here in Psalm 1 is *true* for us? How can we be sure that we are among the righteous and that we will not perish on the Day of Judgment?

Conclusion: the Righteous Man

The answer to these questions depends on how we **understand the reference** to the "*blessed man*" in verse 1. Now, some translations read: "*blessed are those*", which is unfortunate, because it obscures the meaning of this Psalm at a crucial point. Instead of the Psalmist speaking about the blessed state of people *in general* who pursue righteousness, David actually has *one* particular man in view: "*Blessed is the man*" (cf. ESV). Who is this man?

In addition to the presence of the **definite article** before "*man*" in the original Hebrew, there are other reasons to suggest that specific reference to "*man*" here is none other than *the* Messiah, Jesus Christ. For one, the use of the word "*man*" here can only mean "*male*" or "*husband*", and cannot mean female or woman. But, what about the **broader context**? In answering this question, we do well to remember Jesus' discourse on the **road to Emmaus** in Luke 24 where he tells his disciples that all of Scripture – which includes the Psalms – is fulfilled in him. So, while there are those Psalms, like Psalms 2, 22 and Ps 110, which explicitly point to Christ, we nevertheless have authority from Jesus to find him in this Psalm 1 as well. Reading Jesus as the "*blessed*" or "*righteousness*" man in verse 1 is further strengthened when we consider the **close connection** between Psalm 1 and the Messianic Psalm 2. Early Jewish and Christian interpreters have noted that Psalms 1 and 2 form **one literary unit**, not unlike Psalms 42 and 43 at the beginning of Book 2 of the Psalter. Remember that verse and chapter divisions were things added later and are not inspired. What is more, notice that Psalm 2 does **not have a superscription** or heading, which

suggests that it follows seamlessly from Psalm 1. In addition, both Psalms have similar themes of meditation and destruction.

If the biblical evidence supports reading the “*blessed man*” as Jesus, **why then is it important** that we do so? Basically, our salvation depends on it; we have no justification and sanctification without it! Think about it. **Can anyone lay claim to the title** of the “*righteous*” man in Psalm 1? Who has kept himself unstained from sin and free from the corrupting counsel of the wicked? Who makes the law of God his unceasing delight and meditates on it continuously? Adam? Abraham? The model prophet Moses? The king David? No, they all sinned. Brothers and sisters, we have all sinned and therefore none of us can merit God’s favour based on our devotion to God or works of righteousness. We are powerless to become righteous in and of ourselves. The law cannot help us. This is why we need Jesus!

Jesus is the righteous and “*blessed man*” of Psalm 1 because he **never committed evil**, not even once. He *delighted* in the law of God and his whole life was one of *perfect obedience* to the will of God. He kept the company of the wicked, but did *not listen* to their lies. He *meditated* on God’s law day and night. He always thought *right thoughts* about God.

So how do we **become righteous**? How are we blessed? How are we justified and sanctified? How do we become like that fruit tree by the river of living water? How can we take the words of this Psalm upon our lips and make them our own? By faith in Jesus: by finding our refuge in Jesus (Ps 2), who Paul says has become our righteousness (Romans 10). Jesus has made a pathway to God through his perfect obedience and sacrificial death, which we now walk by faith.

Brothers and sisters, the **doorway into the mansion of the Psalter** is the same doorway into eternal life, which is Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. The key to understanding Psalm 1, the Psalter and the entire Bible is in knowing that **our life is found** in the “*blessed*” and righteous man of Psalm 1, verse 1. Through the atoning blood of Jesus we have become a part of the **Tree of Life**, which is Jesus, by faith. We are like the **branches** of that tree planted by streams of living water, which bears fruit in season. Let us therefore live as those who are blessed in Jesus: who walk in the way of righteousness and not wickedness, and who bear the fruit of the Spirit that Christ has given us as a down payment for our eternal inheritance. **Amen.**

Closing hymn: Scripture Versification 15-1

Prayer of benediction:

*May the LORD bless you and keep you;
may the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
may the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*
(Numbers 6:24-26)

*To sing after the service standing:
Scripture Versification 4-6 (68)*

Simon Jooste
Reformed Church Bellville
Date: 25 December 2013