

## 'Making Sense of the Psalms No.1'

Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004

Psalm 1:1-6

### **Introduction**

Some time ago *The Good Book* Publishing Company produced a little tract called "Two Ways to Live". It is basically an introduction to the Christian Faith for those with no spiritual background. There is even a set of Videos to go with the tract which make it into a course for those looking into Christianity for the first time.

It's very simple and yet I'm sure we wonder why we never saw it before: The Bible is just full of descriptions in one place or another of "Two Ways to Live" – One *with* God, and the other *without* God; One *for* God and the other *against* God; One allowing Jesus to be Lord of our lives, the other not - maintaining that I alone have the right to be lord of my own life, and master of my own destiny.

You remember how Jesus drew the Sermon on the Mount to a close in Matthew ch.7. He talks about **Two Gates**: the wide and the narrow that lead onto **Two Ways**: the broad road and the narrow road. He then goes on to talk about **Two Trees** – the good tree and the bad tree that produce **Two types of Fruit** – the good fruit and the bad fruit. And then he finishes by talking about **Two Builders** – the wise and the foolish who build on **Two Foundations** – on the rock and on the sand. So Jesus certainly believed and taught that there were only two ways to live, and indeed two ways to die – either with God or without Him!

But Jesus was really just building on what was already spelt out in the Psalms. Psalm No.1 is the introduction to the whole Book of the Psalms. It is only 6 verses long, and yet it sets the scene for the 150 that will follow. Some people find the Psalms hard to understand. They were of course first written as the hymn book of God's Old Testament people – Israel, but for many people today the Psalms are a closed book. We find them hard to understand or even to preach from. And yet even these were '*recorded for our learning.*' (See 1Corinthians 10:6-13).

This summer I am going to take you through a short series called:

***"Making Sense of the Psalms"***

or maybe I should call it, ***"Making Sense of Selected Psalms"***

because I'm not going to look at all 150 of them!

By way of introduction I'm going to look at Psalm 1 tonight and then Psalms 2, 8 and 19 in June. Then we will look at Three Psalms all about Christ: 22 – Christ on the Cross, 23 – Christ as the Shepherd, and 24 – Christ as the King. And then we'll look at three Psalms all about finding forgiveness: 32, 51 and 103. That will bring us into September, and then we can start a new series of Winter Bible Studies in October.

So, for tonight: **Psalm No.1 – "Two Ways to Live"**

The Psalm breaks up very easily:

(vs.1-3) The Man who walks with God – The righteous man.

(vs.4-5) The Man who rejects God – The wicked man.

(v.6) Conclusion – *“For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked will perish.”*

### **1. The Righteous Man (vs.1-3)**

*‘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.  
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,  
Which yields its fruit in season  
And whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.’*

#### **(i) His Separation (v.1)**

**He does not *walk* – in the counsel of the wicked / ungodly.**

**He does not *stand* – in the way of sinners.**

**He does not *sit* – in the seat of mockers.**

There is obviously a progression of thought here. The man who begins to walk, i.e. conduct his life – in the light of counsel or advice he has received from the wicked or the ungodly, will soon find himself standing with the sinners, siding with them - as opposed to God or God’s people. And very soon they will find themselves sitting down with the mockers or those who pour scorn on God and Christianity in general.

The best course of action is to nip such behaviour in the bud. If you don’t even *walk* with the ungodly, you’ll not end up *standing* with them or eventually *sitting* with them to pour scorn and poke fun at the Christians.

This kind of teaching was of course much more prevalent in the last generation of evangelicals than it is in this one. Separation was perhaps over-emphasised in the past – that we shouldn’t even have friends who are not Christians, in case they influenced us or brought us down as far as our Christian profession was concerned.

In this generation the pendulum has swung the other way. Now in evangelical circles we are encouraged to make friends with our non-Christian neighbours and work colleagues in order that they might see Christ in us, and be attracted to the Saviour. And I believe that’s right.

But there is a fine line between befriending non-Christians in order to win them for Christ, and sitting down with them and becoming more and more like them, so much so that sometimes an on-looker would wonder who is winning who. We need at all times to be careful who is influencing who the most.

**(ii) His Secret (v.2)**

**He delights in the law of the Lord**

**He meditates on God's Law day and night (See Psalm 19, 119).**

What is the secret of standing firm for the Lord in such a situation?

Verse 1 could be described as very negative - well verse 2 is much more positive.

The secret of standing firm for the Lord is having a healthy appetite for God and for His Word.

The man of God will delight in the law of the Lord. He will meditate on it day and night. He will have a hunger for God that can only be satisfied in God's Word.

Psalm 19 and 119 are entirely given over to the Psalmists love for God's Word.

I wonder would we ever dream of writing such Psalms all about our love for God's Word the Bible. Do we really prize it the way we should? Do we really feed upon it night and day? Do we keep a time each day when we allow God to speak to us through His Word the Bible and encourage us in our walk with Him?

That is the secret of spiritual success as far as a Christian is concerned.

We neglect God's Word at our peril. And yet I suspect that many of us do!

**(iii) His Success (v.3)**

**He is like a tree**

**Planted by streams of water**

**Yields fruit in its season,**

**Whose leaf does not wither,**

**Whatever he does prospers.**

The person who spends time in God's Word on a daily basis (according to v.3) will be like a tree that has been planted (or transplanted) and positioned beside a stream of water. In other words they will have an everlasting supply of water and sustenance.

And because they have that intake from God's Word on a regular basis, they will not be spiritually starved, but they will be living and active and vibrant in their walk with God (See Psalm 92:12-14). That is the secret of longevity in the Christian life.

And what will be the result if we are putting our roots down deep into God's Word?

We will yield spiritual fruit in season. (Gal 5:22-23).

Our leaves will not wither – there will be no decay or wasting away.

Whatever we do will prosper! (Now we need to be careful of a health, wealth and prosperity Gospel here – but God does make the way of a righteous man prosper in real spiritual terms). We will have truly fruitful lives as we live them for the Lord taking in our sustenance from God and His Word on a daily basis.

## 2. The Wicked Man (vs.4-5)

*'Not so the wicked!* - They are the exact opposite to righteous men.

*'They are like chaff'* (as opposed to fruitful trees) *that the wind blows away.*

(i) **Worthless.** The chaff is what the wind blows away after the threshing – it's good for nothing, but to be thrown out!

*Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,* (they'll be cast out)

(ii) **Fearful.** The wicked will have to stand before God on judgement day, but their case will not stand up in court. It will be thrown out! They can present whatever case they like, but it will be based on their own righteousness, not Christ's and therefore it will be inadmissible as evidence – it will be thrown out of court.

So they will not *stand*, they will fall and then they will be cast out for all eternity!

*'Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.'* (eternal separation)

(iii) **Outcast.** The Assembly of the Righteous. The assembly is the OT word for the Church. Here it is described as the Assembly of the Righteous, and that's what the Church should be – a company of God's redeemed people. Not righteous in and of themselves, but righteous because God has made them so by his grace. They are righteous in Christ. The wicked will not stand in the assembly of the righteous. They aren't included among the true church here, and they will not be included in the church hereafter either – they will be cast out for good from the presence of other Christians, from the presence of Christ the Head of the Church, and from the presence of God their Maker!

## 3. Conclusion (v.6)

*'For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, (Psalm 23)  
but the way of the wicked will perish.'* (John 3:16-17)

Psalms 1 is made up of just six verses, so the Psalmist has had to come to the point, he hasn't had time to beat around the bush, so he hasn't. He couldn't be more clear.

So here is the conclusion of the matter:

*"The Lord watches over (oversees, shepherds) the way of the righteous"*

Compare the best known of all Psalms – No.23

We can say, in a way that the world can't - *"The Lord is my shepherd."*

*'I shall not want. He leads me beside still waters and restores my soul.'*

But he also leads me through the dark times too – even the valley of the shadow of death. At such times we will fear no evil, for even then The Lord is with us. And that makes all the difference.

But for the wicked the exact opposite is true – *"The way of the wicked will perish."*

A word that is brought out very clearly to us in the best known verse of the NT – John 3:16-17. *"For God so loved the world.... That whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."*

But the wicked, those who have rejected God and his salvation in Christ, will perish.

They will be lost for all eternity – they will be cast out to the place called destruction!  
The stark contrast between these two ways to live couldn't be more clearly spelled out,  
*so which is the wisest way to live our lives*

- *with God or without Him?*
- *For God or against Him?*
- *Worshipping God, or mocking Him?*
- *In Righteousness or in Wickedness?*
- *Godly or Ungodly?*

There are only two ways to live. Let's make sure we are living the right way.  
And let's remember those who are not - that they will turn before it's forever too late!