

A Study in Psalms 1 and 2

*Blessed Is the Man — The Tree Planted by Water — The Chaff —
Government of God in the Earth*

We are reading Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 together.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

"The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion... Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession... Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." — Psalm 2:6, 8, 12

Blessed — and How the Two Psalms Belong Together

Psalm 1 begins with blessed and Psalm 2 ends with the same word: Blessed are all they that put their trust in him. These two psalms form a single unit opening the whole book. The blessed man of Psalm 1 is the man whose moral character is

given — what he does not do, what he delights in, what he is like. The man of Psalm 2 is the king set upon Zion's hill, around whom everything in the whole world hinges, to whom the nations are given for inheritance. Kiss the son — as though he is the central person around whom everything in the whole world is arranged. The moral qualification is given in Psalm 1, and the position that follows from it is given in Psalm 2.

The book of Psalms is chiefly a book concerned with God's governmental ways with respect to the earth — not the heavenly calling of the church, which was a mystery hid from ages and generations (Colossians 1:26). So the Psalms speak of what is earthly and governmental, and these first two set the tone for all that follows. Ephesians 1:10 states God's purpose: to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth. The heavenly side is the church's portion. The earthly side — the kingdom centered in Zion, the rule of the blessed man over the nations — is what these Psalms are setting before us.

The man of Psalm 1, in the fullness of his character, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Who else walked in none of those ways of verse 1? Who else delighted in the law of Jehovah day and night without interruption? Who else bore fruit in season and whose leaf did not wither? And who else is fit to be the king of Psalm 2 to whom every knee shall bow? The remnant of Israel answers to this character in their measure, and they are the subjects fit for such a king. But the pattern and standard is the Lord Himself.

The Negative First — Walking, Standing, Sitting

Accentuate the positive, minimize the negative is not the way God has written His word. The negative comes before the positive throughout Scripture, and Psalm 1 is no exception. God does not leave the negative out. Verse 1 gives three things the blessed man does not do, and verse 2 gives what he does do. This is deliberate, not accidental.

The three negatives are connected with three familiar postures: walking, standing, and sitting. And they form a progression. A person walking in the counsel of the ungodly is moving — he has not yet stopped. But if he continues in that direction, he will slow down and stand still in the way of sinners. And if he remains there, he will sit down in the seat of the scornful. The progression is from motion to rest in exactly the wrong place. What begins as walking in bad direction ends as being settled and at ease in the company of those who mock at God.

The parallel with the lame man at the gate called Beautiful in Acts 3 is striking, but in reverse. That man lay still, unable to move. Peter said: Rise up and walk. He leaped up, stood, and then was walking and leaping and praising God. The movement of grace is the opposite of the downward drift of Psalm 1:1 — from stillness into walking, from walking into leaping, from leaping into praise.

There is a white space between verse 1 and verse 2 in the Bible — just a gap between the negative and the positive. And that gap is the place of the Laodicean. Not in verse 1 and not in verse 2. Neither cold nor hot. But the Laodicean always drifts downward toward verse 1, never upward toward verse 2. Evil communications corrupt good manners. The soul that does not delight in the law of the Lord will not remain neutral — it will slip toward the counsel of the ungodly, the way of sinners, the seat of the scornful. Fence-walking in spiritual things always ends in falling off on the wrong side.

The Seat of the Scornful — and Belshazzar's Feast

The seat of the scornful is a very wide seat — Darby translates it the company of the scornful. The counsel of the ungodly is broad, the way of sinners is broad (as the Lord said, wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat), and the seat of the scornful matches that breadth. There is room for a great many people there. That does not make it right.

What are scorers scorning? They mock at the promises of God. They say: Where is the promise of his coming? Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation. They speak evil of things they have no faith to receive. And to sit in their company — to settle in among those who speak that way about the things of God — is what the blessed man refuses to do.

Daniel was not at Belshazzar's feast. They had to send for him afterward to read the writing on the wall. That feast was perhaps the supreme seat of the scornful — a thousand lords drinking wine, praising the gods of gold and silver, bringing out the vessels of God's house to use in their revelry. Daniel was nowhere in sight. He was sent for afterward, when the scornfulness had produced its inevitable results and the king was terrified by the hand writing on the wall. There is a good example in that for the people of God.

Delighting in the Law — and Psalm 119

But his delight is in the law of Jehovah, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. Psalm 119 is the supreme illustration of this. It is an acrostic psalm of 176 verses, 22 sections of 8 verses each, one section for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In every verse, the word of God is spoken of — by various designations: law, commandments, statutes, ordinances, testimonies, precepts, word, judgments. Each designation captures a different character of what God has given. And the psalmist speaks of it in the most glowing and instructive terms.

To meditate is to feed — the word of God is spiritual food and nourishment, strengthening the soul in pleasing the Lord. The man who meditates day and night is not merely reading occasionally. He is continuously occupied with it. And the result of that continuous feeding is fruitfulness.

The Tree — Rivers of Water — Fruit in Season — the Leaf

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. The symbology of water in Scripture is worth attending to. Still waters (as in Psalm 23) point to the word of God as a place of rest and nourishment. Running or living water (as in John 7:38–39, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water) is associated with the Spirit of God in the power of His ministry. The tree planted by the rivers has both at hand.

It brings forth its fruit in its season — not one great burst but timely fruit, varied fruit, fruit appropriate to the moment. And its leaf shall not wither. The leaf in Scripture first appears in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness — the first great cover-up. Leaves therefore speak of profession, of what is outward and visible about a person. A false profession may look like a leaf for a time, but it dries up and falls. The leaf of the blessed man does not wither. It is a profession that lasts because the root is genuine.

And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. This awaits its full manifestation. Some men's sins go before into judgment and some follow after — that is, all come into manifestation, but not necessarily now. There was once a reading where the question arose: they will reverence my son — yet they didn't. The answer given was simply to repeat the words: They will reverence my son. Every knee is going to bow. Our timing may be off in looking for the manifestation, but God will make good on this verse. And he doeth shall prosper — looking on to the kingdom, to the time when the man of Psalm 2 brings everything into adjustment according to God's mind.

The Chaff — The Judgment — Jehovah Knoweth the Way

The ungodly are not so — but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. The chaff has no water in it, it is dry. The leaf fades and the profession withers. The very opposite of the tree planted by rivers of water. The wind drives the chaff away — there is nothing of substance to it, nothing that can stand when the wind of judgment comes.

Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. There is a congregation — an assembly — of the righteous. Psalm 1 begins with a singular blessed man, and ends with a congregation. He looked perhaps like a lonely man walking a narrow path. But God's purpose for that man is that he should be surrounded — with the Lord Jesus Himself at the center, and all Israel purged and righteous around Him in the coming kingdom. The Deliverer will come to Zion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob; and so all Israel shall be saved. A whole nation forming an assembly of the righteous — every one of them delighting in the law of the Lord. That is what Psalm 150, the final Psalm, expresses: a whole assembly in praise.

Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous. This is more than bare acquaintance with the facts of their path. It carries a determinative force — He has predetermined that way, He sustains those who walk in it, He approves it. In the same sense that Ephesians 2:10 says we are created unto good works that we should walk in them. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations — as Peter wrote of Lot — and that deliverance was real. But the know of our verse is broader still: it is the approval and upholding of the way of the righteous, the way He has established in the earth, the way of the man of Psalm 1, ultimately fulfilled in the man of Psalm 2.

Blessed are all they that put their trust in him — for Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous.