

Psalm 1, Part 1 8-14-22

Happiness Through Meditation

We begin this morning to consider the Lord's word in the first psalm. There are 150 psalms, and it is no accident that the Lord should place this one at the beginning – maybe as a model for all the rest. It is a psalm that sounds very much like one of David's psalms, but is not specifically identified as such. The author is unknown, but the source is heavenly and the wisdom unrivalled. Let's read it 1-6 *How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!*² *But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.*³ *He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.*⁴ *The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away.*⁵ *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*⁶ *For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

I grew up in a smaller town that had one and only one theatre. At that theatre you had precisely one option for the movie you could watch. About ninth grade we all got very excited because a new theatre opened up that offered – get this – two movie options. When our son was that age, I remember taking the family out to a cinema megaplex that offered an amazing 24 movies. It felt more like going into an airport than a theatre. You see signs that point you to MovieGates #16-24. The food costs about the same as it does at an airport. The only difference is that the parking was free and the movie started on time. The movie we went to see had been recommended to us. It was called *Life Is Beautiful*. Remember that show? It was in Italian and our kids weren't too thrilled about a movie they had to read. It felt too much like school but the movie generally was cute and the title intrigues me still. Life is Beautiful. Is that true? Is that what the Bible says? In fact, the answer to that is mostly No. The Scriptures don't exactly say that. In fact, they suggest that life for many is going to be quite unattractive. Really what they say is that life is going to be very different depending on who you are. I could agree with the movie title if we could just add two words before it or after it. Life is Beautiful for some. Or for some life is beautiful. But certainly not for all. One of the things this first psalm does is contrast for us the way of the wicked and the way of the

righteous. It presents two very different kinds of life. But it does begin by saying that a certain way of life is very much beautiful. The word of choice for the psalmist is the word “blessed” or “happy.” How blessed is the man!!

Are Christians interested in that? Are we who follow Jesus supposed to care about being happy? Well, Jesus apparently thought we were. In His sermon on the mount He presented to his followers the way of blessedness when he said, *Blessed are the pure in heart, and the merciful* and so on. It is really a very great fallacy for us to portray Christians as being people interested only in holiness and not in happiness. Philosophically speaking, I believe every human being seeks after happiness. We are all after it, albeit our methodologies in the pursuit, and even our definition of the goal, can vary greatly. I remember reading a novel by Taylor Caldwell entitled, *Captains and Kings*. The book offers a stark contrast between those given to radical self-seeking, the materialistic, power-hungry, success-oriented business tycoons and those given to sympathetic, sacrificial expressions of kindness to others. In one scene the main character is riding in an opulent rail car on an illegal project designed to make himself wealthier when his train pulls up next to a train loaded with wounded Civil War soldiers and the women who were caring for them. This young impervious money-lusting man is transfixed by the sight of a woman who for him was the epitome of human nobility but who was immersed in tending to the suffering. This one scene sets the two philosophies side by side for the reader’s assessment. Where is real life to be found? Where is life beautiful and for whom?

The Bible answers that question more truthfully, more perfectly, more powerfully than any other book. Psalm One begins by telling us where real happiness is to be found. Our God is pro-happiness. Do you see that? There is much confusion on this. From time to time, I used to ask our kids in the morning this question: Would you like this to be the most obedient day of your life? And you know, they had to think about it? They weren’t sure if that’s something they really wanted or not. If I said, would you like it to be the best day or the happiest day, they would say, “sure.” But to be the most obedient day almost sounds ominous doesn’t it? We don’t quickly connect obedience to happiness in our thinking. And certainly, the world doesn’t get it. The Minnesota Gaming commission actually had an advertisement for its lottery that enticed people with these words, “more fun than your minister wants you to have.” That testifies to how so many view our faith. But, hey, nobody in here is having as much fun as this minister and His Lord want you to have. Jesus would not complain that you are pursuing

happiness, but he would ask you why you are settling for so little, why you are settling for the mudpies of the world when He offers a great feast of holy pleasures. You see, we who follow Christ must give new definition to the good life. We are to let people in on the secret that the good life has nothing to do with consumption. And then we are to model this life that Jesus called *abundant*. He said, "I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly."

Well, this is all about the goal described in our text. The goal set before us in the passage is the blessed life, the good life, the happy life. That is point one on your outline, and it takes us now to the second which is the obstacles. What is it that stands in the way of your happiness? What keeps you from achieving the goal? And most of us can name a whole bunch of things right away can't we. You think it is your husband, or your parents, or your child, or your bad back, or your sorry job, or your financial debt, or your crooked nose. You kid yourself into thinking that if those things change you will really have a blessed life. You see the obstacles to joy as being found in your circumstances and when you think that way you are thinking completely like the world. The real obstacles to our happiness are found in what we believe and how we think. This is the positive message of that movie I saw in that movie. "Life is Beautiful" portrays a character who has what the world calls PMA - positive mental attitude. He goes after life with a zest and refuses to let his trials destroy that for himself or his son. I didn't care for the movie really. It was ruined for me that the hero was by implication a fornicator who had no interest in God. It was a manifesto for positive thinking not for true Christianity. But the one point is true - our attitudes, grounded in our beliefs, more than our circumstances, make the difference in our level of joy. When I take an honest look at my life, what I see robbing me of pleasure is not so much my arthritis or my responsibilities or the gas prices. Those things influence - sure, but largely what blocks me from experiencing pure delight and happiness is my own faulty thinking. I think I deserve better treatment than I get from others and so I become angry and sullen. I get depressed because I believe I am a helpless victim rather than a child of God. I get frustrated because in pride I hold myself responsible for things outside my control.

Any lack of joy in me comes from what we might call stinkin thinkin. And if there is hope for a cure we must rightly diagnose the disease. The cancer is in our minds and the cure must address and alter our belief system and our thought life. Sow a thought, reap an act, sow an act, reap a habit, sow a habit reap a life. It all begins up here. This is what is affirmed in our Psalm. The writer says in the first

verse that the man of happiness, that blessed man, avoids sick, unhealthy, untrue thoughts and ways. *1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!* He will go on to talk about what He does do, but he begins with the negative. There are some things you must avoid, must avoid, if you will be blessed. The psalmist describes it in three ways but we can sum it up by saying we must not buy into the world view of the ungodly. Proverbs chapter 1 teaches the very same thing. Look at what it says in Proverbs 1: *10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. 15 My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path.* You don't walk in the counsel, the advice, the teaching of the wicked. You don't stand where they stand. You don't sit where they sit. In modern lingo – you cancel them and their disinformation. The Scriptures of our holy God utterly repudiate the typical value system of the world. They also encourage the spiritual seeker to put distance between himself and that approach to living because the major obstacle to my happiness is my believing the lies of the world. And the same is true for you. You have ingested the deceptions of Satan that have come to you in many ways. Where are you imbibing the world's lies? It could be your family? Many of us came into adulthood laden with lies taught by mom and dad. If you are still in a family where untruth is affirmed you must recognize that and stand firm against it. If you have come out of a family like that you can aggressively seek to correct your thinking according to Scripture. Others of us found your lies at school, either from teachers or students. Many of us buy into lies sold to us on the internet or at the theatre or in the things we read and the songs we hear. Some of you have even been poisoned by lies you picked up at church. In all these ways our thinking has been shaped, and when we finally get our nose in God's book and see what it says we are prepared to distinguish between the counsel of the wicked and the counsel of God, the path of sinners and the path of saints, the seat of the scoffer and the assembly of the righteous. And, when you can see the difference, it is time to flee the one and pursue the other. We must avoid the counsel of the wicked because what you listen to will either purify or pollute your thinking. Who do you walk with? Stand with? Sit with? For the greater part we can choose our company. When Johnny Faber goes off to the University of Alabama next week is he doomed to hang out with the immoral and the arrogant? No. He can find whom he will to stand with and sit with. It's amazing to me how fast, in a group of people, the rebels will find one another and bond. In large groups, opposites don't attract, we gravitate towards those we feel comfortable with. We choose our companions; and the

word of God has much to say about that choice. I Corinthians 15:33 *Do not be deceived; evil company corrupts good morals.* Proverbs 13:20 (ESV) *Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.* What does that say about who you go with, listen to, hang around? To be clear – I am not suggesting you not expose yourself to certain unbiblical ideas. The counsel is to avoid bathing in them. Having friends who don't share your values is okay – but it's not best they be your closest friends and constant companions.

Years ago, I heard a speech by a man who told his audience that we are shaped and changed in life by basically two things: the people we meet and the books we read. I would say it's the people we meet, or read or hear. What made me what I am? Well, at a very young age I met Martha Hendley, and then in high-school I met David Poole, and then at age 18 I met Jimmy Young and at age 19 I met Beth Proctor. I recognized in each of those the counsel of God that I wanted to walk in. And then I read JC Ryle and AW Tozer and the Apostle Paul. I heard RC Sproul and Al Martin and Leonard Ravenhill. The people I met, read, heard. Whatever good there is in me now I owe to the grace and truth of God I found in such as these. Dear friend, are the people you are reading, hearing, living with the ones you want to shape your life - because they will. They will. We who are parents can find some obvious application here can't we? Part of good parenting is to monitor what goes in and out of our children's hearts and minds. I believe the Lord is grieved by what the children of Christians are attending to on their screens. It is largely the parents who will be held responsible by God! And there is more to this than just saying, No, No, No. There is the provision of good literature and good theatre and good and wholesome friends and fun. The most expensive thing my wife bought our kids for Christmas some years was a set of wonderful books for young readers, books that encouraged our kids in the way of truth not error, in the way of purity not sensuality - books in which God has a place. God's World Book Club is the kind of thing you parents should get acquainted with. Give your children some guidance in where to walk, and stand and sit - not with the foolish but the wise.

Alright then, we move on, shall we beyond verse 1. Verse 2 takes us to the positive side of the blessed life and we have hinted at it already. Verse 2 tells us that the blessed, happy man delights, takes joy in, the law of the Lord and meditates in that law day and night. Wow! We have seen the goal - the blessed life. We have seen the obstacles - the lies of the world. Now we see the focus, which is the word of God. When the psalmist writes about meditating in the law of

God don't think that refers to just the commandments. That word "law," in the Hebrew, "Torah", has reference to the entirety of the Scripture. At the time this was written, it would have meant the first five books, the law, or books of Moses. For us, it means Genesis to Revelation. This word, this book, is the delight of the blessed man. Now, understand, this is not the only thing the Scripture says the blessed man delights in. We are told to delight also in the Lord Himself. It is possible for someone to be a bibliolater, a person who is devoted to the book but not the God of the book. Don't be that. But see here that the one who delights in God delights in His word. David said in Psalm 119 "Oh how I love Thy law, it is my meditation day and night." Does that strike you as strange? If so, it shows how distant you are from real Biblical values. What you delight in says volumes about your character. Do you delight in things that are vile or impure or trivial? Or do you delight in the holy things of God? That is a searching and convicting question.

Then our text says that happy people meditate. They meditate. Now, if that word makes you think of someone in a long flowing robe squatting and chanting you probably don't get it. There is a type of meditation taught today that involves emptying your mind. You meditate on one hand clapping or on square circles until your brain sort of shuts down for a while. And you end up feeling refreshed. It makes you a bit ditzy but I'm told it has a soothing effect on the nerves. That is not what the Bible talks about. This meditation is directed, purposeful thought on a subject, namely here the law or word of God. It is not something to be done for 10 minutes a day, it is to be a continual, frequent activity. And believe it or not - God says this activity is the key to happiness. This is a big deal. And Psalm 1 isn't the only place that says so. Listen to Psalm 119:15-16 *I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways.* ¹⁶ *I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word.* 23b-24 *Your servant meditates on Your statutes. 24 Your testimonies also are my delight; they are my counselors.* We don't listen to the counsel of the wicked, but the counsel of Scripture. More from Psalm 119:27 *Make me understand the way of Your precepts, so I will meditate on Your wonders.* 48 (NLT) *I honor and love your commands. I meditate on your decrees.* 97 *O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.* 148 *My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.* The man of God is described here as one who lives in, absorbs, soaks in the beauty of God's word. Paul, in Colossians, says to let the word of God live richly in you. Jesus says, John 8:31 (ESV) *If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.* This is what our Lord wants for us - to know the blessedness of having His mind, His heart become our own thru the word. Can you

today grasp, by faith, that this is what will make your life blessed - even that this practice of meditating will make you into a fruitful tree, one who will prosper in everything. Oh my, we will have to pick up our thoughts next week right here. We will start next time contemplating the value of Scriptural meditation.

But we aren't done for today. Before we go consider some practical applications of this psalm. How is this going to change what you do tomorrow? Between today and next Sunday I am going to give you 10 possible ways to apply Psalm 1, to put aside the rot of this world and become a biblical meditator. Let's cover the first six now and save the last six for next time.

#1 - Eliminate the influx of trash into your mind. For many of you that means cut TV or Netflix or Hulu out of your life. Ugh! It may be as precious to you as right hand or right eye but if it makes you stumble cast it from you. Don't play games in the Christian life. Mean business! That means a determined farewell to racy dramas or sit-coms or the coarser stuff out there. If you love Jesus, stop it! Cut out the secular music with the rotten lyrics. It is spiritual poison. And if you are not willing to say "no" to your mental pollutants you aren't going anywhere as a Christian. You will continually find your faith unsatisfying and your religion unfulfilling and powerless. Romans 12:2ab *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* Otherwise, you don't stand a chance against the world, the flesh and the devil.

Application #2 - Fill your ears with good things. Control what you hear. Some of you have jobs that allow you to listen to quality teaching or music. Whatever time you have, use it for good. The internet is both a cesspool of filth and the greatest resource for learning ever. Take advantage of what it offers. The Lord recently spoke to me about my need to be worshipping more as I drive by using the great music available via my phone.

Application #3 - Fill your eyes with good things. Control what you see and what you read. Instead of reading garbage, read good things. Scripture, of course, comes first. But there are other fine books and magazines and websites that give you news and current events from a Christian angle. A reading Christian is almost always a growing Christian. You should always have a quality answer to the question: what are you reading these days?

Application #4 - Use music for good. Everyone loves music and it is a powerful thing because songs stay with you. *Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip, that started from this tropic port, aboard this tiny ship.* It's ridiculous that I still know those words from a TV show I haven't seen in fifty

years. But music can do this. Often you will find yourself humming the same tune all day. That can be good, or bad. Make it good. The ancient Hebrews were great at this. They learned Scripture in song. Psalm 119:54a (NLT) *Your decrees have been the theme of my songs.* David believed in Scripture songs. In fact, he wrote a bunch of them. By your singing you can memorize and meditate on Scripture.

Application #5 - Keep good company. Evil company corrupts good morals and it also corrupts a good thought life. Choose those friends that are going to direct your thoughts in the way of purity. Philippians 4:8 *Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.* That is a lot easier to do when those around you are committed to doing the same.

Application #6 - Plan special times of meditation. I think here of a daily devotional, a set-aside time to read God's word and pray. You can meditate all day but special times are vital Psalm 119:147-148 *I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Your words.* ¹⁴⁸ *My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.* The writer says, "before dawn and at night" the quiet times of the day he gives to meditating on God and His word. In addition, it is good to have more extended seasons of quiet and contemplation. If you don't plan for these they just won't happen. So, plan - because those who fail to plan - plan to fail.

The other six applications, more on the benefits of meditation, more on the blessedness of psalm one obedience, more on the future of the righteous and the wicked - all of that is ahead for next week - some time, same pulpit. Be here and God will bless. To make it even better, go ahead this week to apply what we've learned. Next week I'll ask if you meditated in the word day and night - you be ready with a happy answer. Let's pray