

Psalm 1, Part 2 – Happiness Through Meditation

8/21/22

We began last time to look at this psalm, the theme of which is happiness thru meditation. To many people both elements of the theme are a surprise. They thought God didn't care about people being happy, that God was the sort who looked around trying to catch folks being happy so he could put a stop to it. The fact of the matter is that God speaks to us much about the way to happiness, urges us on to it, sets it out as our goal, shows us the way, and supplies us every needed grace for the journey. But then, God surprises us again when he suggests to us in the first psalm that the key to happiness is found not in money, not in family, not in pleasures, not in self-esteem, but in meditating on and in God's law, God's word revealed in Scripture. This seems so unlikely to us, so unreal, but here it is in plain print in the first of all God's wonderful psalms.

Let's read it again as we continue our ponderings 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! ²But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³He 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. ⁴The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ⁶For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.*

The psalmist begins by telling us what a man in search of blessedness, or happiness must avoid. There is the counsel of the wicked, the path of sinners, the seat of the scoffers. These are where you will find the lies of the world which we saw last time form the most formidable obstacles to our happiness. We think we lack happiness because we lack health, lack money, lack friends, when in fact, our unhappiness is rooted in the lies of the world which we have believed. Stinkin thinkin is the problem, and the solution suggested in our text is proper thinking, truthful perspectives, a thought life developed thru one's meditation on Scripture.

Some time ago I cut out an article from a newspaper. It was an astonishing article with a surprising title. Some of you can read it. It says, "Teen-Age Brains Work Differently." I read the article's assertions that teenagers process data in different

ways than adults, something any parent of a teen already recognized. If your child is becoming a teenager, you need to come to grips with the special needs of this age group. For example, travel is complicated when involving teenagers. I quote from Dave Barry's Travel Guide, under the section, *Traveling with teenagers*. "Traveling with teenagers is somewhat more difficult than traveling with humans." It's very important for you to be sensitive to the fact that, during this difficult transition from child to adult, your teenagers are undergoing intense emotional stresses that cause them, for solid psychological reasons, to regard you as the biggest geek ever to roam the planet.

Also, teenagers are bored. By everything. Show a teenager an actual volcanic eruption, in progress, featuring giant billowing clouds of smoke, hot rocks, raining from the sky, lava flows destroying entire villages and the teenager, eyebrows arched with sarcasm, will look at you and say, "Gee, this is swell" then return to the car and tune into his iPhone. Which brings me back to my point. Thought life. Beth and I are walking in the Spring when we come upon a gaggle of three high schoolers waiting for the school bus. The three are standing with their backs to each other and all of them are looking at phones. I see this and consider how the prevalence of our electronic noisemakers are affecting society. You don't have to talk anymore or even listen to the same music; we all can have our own personal concert at all times.

One of the results of the electronic media, in all of its expressions, is that we seldom have time or take time to just think. Some of you avoid quiet like the plague. And we do so to our own peril. God says, that the happy guys and girls are meditating, mentally chewing on the law of God consistently. Joshua 1 is a great verse on meditation. God appears to Joshua at the beginning of his leadership over the children of Israel and says Joshua 1:8 *This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.*

Now, I do think that means we need some quiet, meditative moments in our day. But I don't suggest that is the only way to meditate. One of the other great Scriptures on meditation is found in Deuteronomy 6:6 *These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.* This is the thing on which to dwell,

the word of God. But how do you get those on your heart? 6:7-9 *"You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸"You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* How do you get em on your heart? You have plagues in your home with Scripture on them. Bracelets you wear. Apps on your phone. God directs us to surround and immerse our lives, our senses, our thoughts, our conversations in the truth of His word. This is what we mean by the practice of meditation and that is point one for today, the practice of meditation is presented as the key to happiness. The omnipresent media of our day has the capacity to actually help us in this if we let it, but more often than not it is the greatest enemy of the contemplative life and of biblical meditation. The choice of how to use the media and how to spend your time and thus how to direct your thinking is your own. And this is critical.

Listen to AW Tozer: "What we think about when we are free to think about what we will - that is what we will soon become." Our voluntary thoughts not only reveal what we are, they predict what we will become. Except for that conduct which springs from our basic natural instincts, all conscious behavior is preceded by and arises out of our thoughts. The will can become a servant of our thoughts, and to a large degree even our emotions follow our thinking. 'The more I think about it the madder I get' is the way the average man states it, and in so doing pays an unconscious tribute to the power of thought." Do you see that, my friend? This is why the psalmist begins by saying the blessed man must avoid the counsel, the ideas of the wicked. This is why he says to delight in and meditate upon the truth. Tozer goes on, "Thinking about God and holy things creates a moral climate favorable to the growth of faith and love and humility and reverence." Do you think that's true? If so, do you want to grow in faith and love and humility and reverence? Then give your mind to the Lord. Give your thoughts to the Lord, by choosing what you will listen to and watch and contemplate and discuss. This is what the practice of biblical meditation is all about and it is crucial.

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.* Why is that so important

that we find this instruction in the Old Testament law and the wisdom literature and the gospels and the epistles? Let me offer four obvious benefits of a healthy thought life, of meditating on God and His word.

First, it fills the gap between the mind and the heart. Did you know there was such a gap? Lots of things you accept with your mind never make it to your heart where they can affect your emotions and your deeds. For instance, I believe God is in control of all things. But my emotions aren't fully consistent with that thought. I know God loves me, but sometimes I feel unloved. That is because there is a gap between the heart and the mind. Meditation is the bridge by which the truth can cross over into your heart. The more you think about a truth, the more you really, really believe it. Some of you have studied the Bible a long time but you keep studying anyway to remember what you forgot and to become convinced in your heart of what you know.

The second benefit of a good thought-life is that it renews your mind. Romans 12:2 says to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Ephesians 4:22-23 *in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,* ²³*and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind.* The former manner of life is conformity to the world; the new life is transformation of the mind to think in a Biblical way. But your mind won't be renewed unless you replace its worldly diet with a godly one.

The third benefit of meditation is that it prevents sin. The word of God, the truth, is the Spirit's sword by which you fight the devil. Psalm119:11 *Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You.* When the word of God is flowing and circulating through your brain, temptation loses its power, for in the moment of decision you remember the word of God and you stand fast.

Benefit of meditation #4 sums it all up - so get this. You become a fruitful tree. Isn't that great? You're probably thinking," Oh boy, I always wanted to be a tree." And you really did, you just didn't know it till you read this psalm which promises that the blessed man who ponders God's word 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.* It is common in Scripture to compare men with trees. Jeremiah 17:5-6 This is what the Lord says: "Cursed are

those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the Lord. ⁶They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness, in an uninhabited salty land. That is the fate of the one who trusts in human strength - like a dry desert bush. But read on 7-8 *“But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. ⁸They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.* Very similar language to our text. Of course, the New Testament speaks often of the fruit that men bear doesn't it? There are a lot of similarities I suppose between men and trees. Both have an outer, visible dimension and an inward invisible dimension. There is root and there is fruit and the relation of one to the other is that of cause to effect. The fruit is that which can be seen and enjoyed, but botany teaches that it's the root that makes it all possible, that invisible subsurface reality that nourishes and feeds the entire plant. For the human that root is called typically the heart. Jesus taught plainly and powerfully that good deeds flow from a good heart and evil deeds from a corrupt heart.

Proverbs 4:23 *Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.* That is, the heart is the source of everything. Like humans, like trees. A tree with a root system planted in good soil, moist soil, soil that will not experience draught is a tree destined to a long and prosperous life. Like the water that nourishes the tree, so is the word of God to nourish the soul. Meditation is the root system that absorbs that nourishment. This is the imagery. Plainly put, the psalmist is saying that the biblical meditator will be strong, will endure, and will be fruitful and happy as he drinks in God's pure word.

Then there is that last phrase in verse 3d *in whatever he does, he prospers.* Is that really suggesting that meditating in God's word will make you successful in everything you do? That is the way it seems to read, but can that be correct? When I was in seminary, I played a lot of basketball with fellow students. If one of us was having an especially good shooting day on the court we would sometimes hear, “Wow, you must have had some great devotions this morning!” We said it in jest, but is there some truth here? That's a difficult question to answer. Is a godly person a better student, better athlete, better artist, better businessman because he is godly?

Generally speaking, the answer to that would be “yes.” I remember hearing Bill Gothard’s testimony of how he went from being a C student in high school, to an A student and the change he attributed to meditation. We read a few minutes ago from Joshua chapter one. Look again at Joshua 1:8 *This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.* Success as a governor, as a general? How does God affect war? How does God affect farming? If you read your Bible, you discover that God has His hand in both those things. He communicates early on for Joshua that the key to military success is following God’s law. He tells His people in Deuteronomy that their agricultural endeavors would be cursed or blessed according to their obedience. Listen, if you have a God-centered world view you see that He is a key to everything; you understand yourself, others, the laws of nature and the spiritual kingdom. You have tremendous advantages that will make you more successful in anything to which you apply your hand and your prayers. By no means am I suggesting that the results of every sporting event or business transaction reveals Gods opinion of the participants, but I am saying that the personal strength gained from meditation will make a difference in everything you do. The principle is true.

Okay then, we have seen today the practice of meditation and the benefits of it. Let’s look now at what happens to those who don’t go this way. The last three verses portray for us the wicked man, and it’s not pretty. Psalm 1:4-6 *The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ⁶For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.* The wicked are not so. That is, they don’t prosper like a riverside tree. They don’t bring forth fruit. In fact, it says they are like chaff. Chaff is that worthless part of the wheat that is discarded and burned. It speaks of the wind driving it away. It was the custom in ancient days to separate the wheat from the chaff by a process called winnowing. They would take the wheat and throw it up into the air, into the wind, and because the chaff was light it would blow away while the wheat landed where you threw it. The chaff, like the wicked have no weight. The ungodly see themselves as important but really, they are nothing. Isaiah 17:13a *The nations rumble on like the rumbling of many waters.* They say, “Listen to us, we are great and important!” 13bf *But He will rebuke them and they will flee far away, And be*

chased like chaff in the mountains before the wind, Or like whirling dust before a gale. There is an interesting corollary in Scripture between the words for weight and the words for glory. Weight and glory are basically the same thing. II Corinthians speaks of God working in us an eternal weight of glory. Because of God's presence in our lives, we are heavy, but those who don't know God are lightweights, spiritually speaking. This is where most of the world is. And they will be blown away at judgment day. That is where the psalm goes next. 5 *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.* They didn't want to be with us in this life, so they won't be with us in the next. Judgment day is coming for sure, and the wicked will not survive it. They can't stand judgment! Now, the implication here is that we will all go thru judgment. We will all pass thru that, but some will come out standing and some won't. The Bible indicates that judgement day will bring to bear the same elements for everyone; but because of what we are some of us will come out shining like gold and some of us will be destroyed. The Bible speaks of judgment as wind or as fire. The wind will blow and test your house - sort of like the wolf in the three little pigs. The fire will do the same. I Corinthians 3 speaks of the fire of judgment that will reveal whether you built your house of wood, hay, straw or whether you made it out of gold, silver, and precious stones. The unconverted will not make it in that day because they are chaff. Chaff burns. John Baptist said of Jesus in Matthew 3:12 *His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* "The psalmist says, 6b *the way of the wicked will perish.* The way of the righteous? That way is connected to Jesus. 6a *The Lord knows the way of the righteous.* That word knows means to be intimately connected to. Genesis said Adam knew Eve and she conceived. God knows our ways. He is involved in our lives and gives them the glory, the weight to stand thru trials and to stand thru judgement. Praise God! So, make sure that the Lord knows your ways, that your lightness is connected with His heaviness, His glory. Stand with Jesus and you will stand forever.

The application we shall end on though, is the major thrust of the psalm. Happiness thru meditation. Remember last week I gave you six practical applications of the teaching of Psalm one? We have four more today, numbered on your outline as 7-10. Application #7 then is to learn to pray always. Pray without ceasing, says the apostle. Meditate in God's word day and night says the psalmist. Those two are

compatible, not contradictory. Prayer is a form of meditation. So, when you have a minute, lift up prayers to God. Thank Him, praise Him or pray for something or someone. Prayer is something you can take anywhere.

Application #8 is to be under a regular teaching ministry. In other words, get to worship services and Bible classes where the word of God is being taught. Regardless of the quality of the teaching you will be spending your time meditating on the truth. Someone was heard to scoff at the value of preaching. They said, "I've been to church for years and can only remember two or three sermons that I've heard." In response, another said, "That may be true of meals too. They aren't memorable but I believe I'm better off today because of them."

Application #9 is to use your time in the car wisely. Car trips can be a waste of time or an opportunity to grow. What will you make them? Listening to sermons or books on trips is a great idea. And there is always the possibility of memorizing Scripture. It was during my long solo drives between Mississippi and Florida during my seminary days that I managed to memorize entire books of the Bible. By doing that you can turn wasted time into some of the most profitable experiences of your life.

Application #10 following on the heels of that is to memorize Scripture. What a valuable practice this is, giving strength to both mind and heart. If you memorize a passage, it is always there to bring to mind for meditation.

In all these ways you can heed the wisdom of Psalm one, to put aside the lies of the world and soak your soul in the word of God. For many of you, I know, this all sounds way too religious for you, too rigorous, kind of fanatical. You just can't see yourself sitting memorizing Scripture in your car. You prefer a milder religion. You want to keep your Christianity in its place, not let it dominate your life. I understand. You should understand that as long as you approach it that way you will continue to find Jesus to be unworthy of a serious investment. You will not find satisfaction in your religion because you have not really sought it there. Faith looks at a passage like Psalm one, sees the description of a blessed life, says "that's what I want" and then cries out to God to make the changes and the commitments required. May God give you faith to believe and faith to follow in His way of happiness thru meditation.