

Psalm 1
How Blessed Is the Man

Psalm 1

May 18, 2008

Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

This morning I want us to step away from our study of the book of Ephesians for just this morning, and step back and look at, really, a bigger issue. And that is, why we're here. In fact, let me begin by asking you that very basic and most important question. Why is it that you're here this morning? There may be some of you who would say, well, that's easy. Because my spouse made me come. Or perhaps some of you young people are thinking, that's easy, because my parents gave me no choice.

But most of us who are here this morning have some level of spiritual motivation for attending. I mean, let's face it; there are easier ways to get coffee and donuts. Although our specific reasons for being in church this morning, for regularly attending, may vary, most of us are here for one basic reason. We share a common desire. We all want to have an effective, successful, spiritual life. A life defined by spiritual life and vitality, by stability, by fruitfulness.

There's a sense in which all of Scripture lays down the roadmap for that kind of life. But this morning, I want us to look at one passage that holds out the promise for a life like that, and not only holds out the promise, it lays out the path. And that passage is Psalm 1, Psalm 1.

I invite you to turn there with me this morning. Let me begin by orienting you to the book of Psalms itself. The purpose of the book of Psalms is to provide us with a divinely intended record and pattern of man expressing himself to God. Psalm 1 was probably written as the introduction to the entire book of Psalms. In fact, Charles Spurgeon has said that Psalm 1 is the text of which the rest of the Psalms are simply a sermon.

Most conservative scholars attribute this first Psalm either to David or to Solomon. It is one of the wisdom psalms. One of those psalms intended to guide us in the path of divine wisdom. Thomas Watson, the English Puritan, wrote of Psalm 1, "It may well be called a Christian's

guide, for it discovers the quicksand where the wicked sink down to perdition, and the firm ground on which the saints tread to glory.”

Let me read this brief Psalm to you. You may even have it committed to memory but follow along in your Bible as I read this magnificent introduction to the Psalter.

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!
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night,
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.
The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away,
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous,
For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

The theme of this first psalm is fairly obvious. And that is, that there are only two paths in life. There is the way of the righteous, and there is the way of the wicked. The first three verses describe the way of the righteous. Verses 4 and 5, the way of the wicked, and verse 6 tells us the end of those two ways, where those two paths ultimately lead.

But I want you to begin this morning by looking particularly at the spiritual prosperity that accompanies the way of the righteous. Notice in verse 1 how the Psalmist introduces this righteous man. He says, “how blessed is the man”. Now, if you could read this verse in Hebrew, you would be surprised by the word you find here. Because there are two different Hebrew

words that are translated “blessed” in our English text. The first Hebrew word is “barak”. It refers to God actively blessing someone. When you read that God blessed so-and-so, it’s the word “barak” that’s used. That’s not the word that’s here in this passage. Instead, it’s the second Hebrew word, the word “eshere”. This is an important Old Testament word. It occurs some forty-five times in the Old Testament.

But here’s the surprising part. It is never used to refer to God. And it is never something that God does. You will never find God doing this to someone. Instead, this word describes a strictly human conclusion about another person or circumstance. It’s as if there is a human being, another human being, closely inspecting the life of the righteous person and coming to a particular conclusion about that person.

We could translate that first phrase like this. “Oh to be envied is the man. How desirable is the life of this man. How completely happy is the man.” Our Lord began the sermon on the mount, His most famous sermon, with the word that’s used in the Greek translation here in Psalm 1. He uses that same word to begin with those series of blessings we call the beatitudes. You see, the man who is blessed in this sense, the man who is “eshere” enjoys an objective state of well-being in every area of life that is clearly observable by others. An objective state of well-being.

And that objective state of well-being, if we were to study this word throughout the Old Testament, which we do not have time to do this morning, you would find that this word is not only an objective state, but it is accompanied by subjective feelings. Feelings like satisfaction and joy and delight. Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke writes, “The sages of Israel reserved the exclamation, ‘eshere’ for people who experience life as the Creator intended.” How happy, how desirable.

In verse 3, the Psalmist shows us exactly what this state of well-being looks like. He defines, in verse 3, what it means to be blessed, to be ‘eshere’, Look at verse 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. Notice how the righteous person is described here. How this blessed person is described. He has life. A tree that has leaves and fruit is what?

Alive! There's life to it. There's vitality. And this enviable man has spiritual health and life and vitality. There is spiritual energy coursing through his life. Unlike the wicked who are pictured as chaff, which contains no biological life at all.

The righteous man is also carefully cared for. Notice the Hebrew word "planted". The word planted means literally, transplanted. And the word for streams can refer to natural streams, but it is often used of irrigation canals. So, this tree has been carefully planted, transplanted by a source of water. This tree has been carefully cared for by someone, and it has been transplanted by a constant source of strength and nourishment.

This is a picture, folks, of sovereign grace. A tree doesn't plant itself. A tree doesn't transplant itself. It requires the careful and thoughtful work of a gardener who tends it. In this case, God has changed the character of this man from chaff--dead worthless material that blows away with the wind. He's changed the character of this man into a tree, and then He has transplanted his life next to a constant supply of spiritual life where he will grow strong and healthy. Contrast that with chaff which is allowed to be driven away by the wind. You see, one defies the storm, the tree defies the storm, the chaff is driven by it.

The righteous life, verse 3 also tells us, is a life of significance. Notice, in verse 3 it says, "it yields its fruit in its season". When a tree bears fruit, it is fulfilling the reason for its existence. It's making a contribution in the world. It's benefiting others. Chaff, on the other hand, is absolutely worthless and good for nothing. So, this righteous man's life, this enviable life, is marked by significance and purpose and benefit to others. He goes on in verse 3 to say that the enviable life has a permanence, an endurance. Notice he says its leaf does not wither.

Many years later, the prophet Jeremiah borrows from this Psalm, and he explains what this expression "his leaf does not wither" means. He explains that it means that even when drought comes, this person's life survives. Compare that with the chaff. What the wind doesn't drive away is gathered and burned, but the righteous enviable life is enviable because he endures. There is stability. There is permanence. There is endurance. Verse 5 even tells us that he will endure the final judgment.

Then at the end of verse 3, the Psalmist leaves the picture of the tree, (pardon the pun), and returns to a straightforward assertion. “And in whatever he does, he prospers.” Now, folks, here’s the point. Listen carefully. The enviable man in Psalm 1 enjoys a remarkable state of well-being, accompanied by joy and satisfaction. He is filled with strong spiritual life. He is carefully cared for by God. He fulfills the purpose for which God made him, and he brings lasting benefit to all the people around. He has permanence and endurance and stability. And whatever his external circumstances may be, his soul prospers and thrives.

Friends, that is exactly what every one of us wants. That’s what we want to be. Let me say, even further, it’s what all of us, without exception, are pursuing. But here’s the tragedy. We can pursue those worthy ends in the wrong way, and in fact, it happens all the time. Certainly, it happens with the world at large, but even for Christians, we can pursue spiritual stability in all the wrong places.

Every couple of years, some new solution shows up in the Christian marketplace. Some new solution that promises to deliver what Psalm 1 describes. In the last decade, there have been dozens of such solutions marketed to Christians. If only you’ll do this, then you’ll have this kind of life. What really needs to happen is you need to experience God. Or you need to rediscover your femininity or your masculinity. Or you need to find your purpose. The list goes on and on and on. Wave after wave of new ideas—new solutions for how to gain the spiritually successful life described in Psalm 1.

By the way, let me just say in passing that the same temptations come to pastors pursuing success in the church as well. Maybe, the solution is just to help unbelievers be more comfortable. If we could just make unbelievers more comfortable in the church, then the church will be successful and will grow. Or, let’s add staging, and lighting and props, to sort of create interest and keep people’s attention. Or maybe we just need to show that we’re more connected to the culture. So, let’s have a men’s gathering with, you know, and play poker and drink beer. That’ll do it. And the list goes on and on and on.

What's true in the church is true in our individual lives. We pursue these worthy ends. We pursue this kind of life in all the wrong ways. Do you want the kind of life we've just read about together? Do you want that kind of spiritual vitality and permanence and fruitfulness? Well, the answer is right here in Psalm 1. There are only two paths in life. The way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. And listen, folks, the way of the righteous is the way of the Bible. And the way of the wicked is everything else.

The psalmist develops this crucial point. He develops this basic point negatively in verse 1, and positively in verse 2. How do you get on the path that promises an enviable life? Well, the psalmist here identifies two foundational commitments; two foundational commitments that characterize the path of the enviable life, the path of the righteous.

The first commitment that we must make to gain this kind of life is this. Abandon every human way. Abandon every human way. Look at verse 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" Now, it's possible that those three expressions picture the progression of sin from walking to standing to sitting. And certainly, sin is a downward slide, a downward spiral. But that's probably not the primary point the psalmist is making here.

These three verbs are the three postures of someone who is awake. If you're not asleep, you're walking, standing, or sitting. In the whole of his waking life, whether walking, standing, or sitting, the righteous man has nothing to do with these things. By the way, the Hebrew grammar here reinforces this idea. Because the tense of all three verbs speaks of one who avoids these things as the habit and custom of his life. He entirely abandons them.

So, what does the righteous man abandon? Notice in verse 1 there are three things he abandons. He does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. Now the word counsel has to do with how we think. The word literally means, "to give advice in the making of decisions". In fact, this same Hebrew word appears in Exodus 18 when Jethro gives advice to Moses, you remember, about how to simplify his life, how to spread out the administrative load. He gives him counsel. He gives him advice in the making of decisions. So, by 'the counsel of the wicked' here, the

psalmist means the advice of those who break God's law. The righteous do not, as a habit and custom of life, walk in the counsel of those who disregard God's law.

Now, let's just be honest here for a moment. Because we live in the world, all of us follow the advice of the people around us in a number of ways, many of them harmless. Just take one example. Men, if you are younger than 40, you probably prefer to wear your hair with that sort of fashionably messy look that's currently in style, unless of course you're part of one group who prefers bald. If you're 40 to 60, then it's very possible that your hair is meticulously arranged and carefully held in place by a variety of creams, gels and sprays. And if you're over sixty, you're just grateful to have some. And you do whatever you can to spread them out over all the landscape.

Now, why is it in those categories like hair and so many other things, why do we make those choices? We think it's because we're so individualistic that we're carving our own path. But in truth, it's because we are following the advice of the people around us. That's how they wear their hair, and so that's how we wear ours. And ladies, you can laugh but the same thing is true for you. The men were an easier target, and a safer one. And all of that's okay because the Bible doesn't dictate hair style.

The problem comes when we follow the advice of the wicked about how we live our lives. How are we tempted to listen to the advice of unbelievers in the daily living of our lives? Well, foundationally, we are tempted to adopt the philosophies of our time, to be influenced by the philosophies that govern our time. Just as a couple of examples.

We live in a time permeated by naturalism. And naturalism tells us that macro-evolution is fact. And so, many Christians will try to synchronize the early chapters of Genesis with evolution. Humanism is another major philosophy of our times. It tells us that man is the center, and so we as Christians can easily be tempted to make man the measure of all things. And so, when we have to solve problems, we look around us. We look at the polls, the surveys, and let that govern us rather than asking what does the Bible say about this issue.

What does the Bible say about politics or ethics or entertainment or on and on the list goes? Our culture is influenced by post-modernism, which tells us that there are no absolutes. And so, Christians today, in churches like this one, are shaping the Bible according to whatever meaning they prefer. How many times have you heard Christians, and this is just a subtle expression of it, say, well this is what the Bible means to me? Now, that may be well-intentioned, but folks, it doesn't matter what the Bible means to you. The question is, what does the Bible mean? So, (we can be attempted) we can be tempted (rather), to adopt the philosophies of our time.

But we can also be tempted to embrace the lifestyles and priorities of our times that are built on secular advice. If you turn on the television or you read the newspaper, you look at magazines, you do any surfing on the internet, you come across these sorts of priorities. They scream at you. Put yourself first. Look out for yourself first. You're the one that matters. If you don't do it, no-one will. Pursue money and position and stuff. That's what life is all about.

Or when it comes to marriage, we're told the secular advice is: construct it however you want. Take whatever roles you like. Our marriage is 50-50. Well, that's a long way from Ephesians 5 and Titus 2. Others say, well, you can decide what methods you are going to use in parenting. And by the way, some methods, they say are completely outdated. If you spank your children, even in a controlled loving way, then you are warping their personalities. You are tending them toward violence, and on and on it goes. We can buy into the mindset of our times.

By the way, a subtle one that some Christian families are struggling with is the idea that's pervasive in secular culture and has now taken some influence in the Christian community, that family is more important than any other priority. Listen, you ought to care for your family. You ought not to neglect them. You ought to serve them; you ought to love them. True love for Christ begins at home. All of that is true. But if your priority is on family over the church of Jesus Christ, you have a problem. For the Christian, Jesus defined the primary relationships for us when he pointed around to his disciples and said, "these are my mother and my brothers and my sisters." In heaven, the familial relationships will not exist in the same way that they do here, but the relationships that we share in the church of Christ will.

There are so many ways we can be influenced by the culture. Whatever form it may take, God is clear that the righteous man, whose life is truly enviable, abandons the advice of the wicked at every turn and at every level. Notice verse 1 again. Verse 1 adds, “he does not stand in the path of sinners.” “Sinners” describes those who have missed the mark, who fall short of the divine standard. Usually it refers to those who’ve committed specific offenses against specific commands. And the psalmist says the righteous person doesn’t stand in the path of sinners.

That word “path” is such an important word. It is one of the most important Old Testament words. It occupies a primary place of importance in wisdom literature. The Hebrew word is “derek”. Literally, it refers to the path or ruts formed in the ground by feet and carts passing again and again over the same ground. And so, it came to be the perfect word, metaphorically, to refer to a person’s lifestyle and habits. I’ve used this illustration with you before, and I’ll use it again, because I can think of no better.

When I was growing up in south Alabama, our family lived on the edge of civilization, and we had this World War II army surplus jeep. And there was nothing behind us but swamp and woods, and so, we had so much fun with that jeep. I mean, 54” of annual rainfall, red Alabama clay, and a jeep. What could be more fun for a kid growing up? And we had a blast. But if you ran that jeep over the same trail just a few times, because of the clay, because of the rainfall, it would form, the tires would form deep ruts. I remember trying to drive the jeep after it had rained, which it did all the time. And you tried to keep the wheels up on the center where the ruts had been cut, up on the center piece, and on the side. And you could do it for awhile, but it didn’t take very long until you felt the wheels start slipping and sliding, and pretty soon you were back in the rut.

The Hebrew word for “path” is like those ruts that you can’t keep out of. It speaks of predictable patterns of behavior. The psalmist says we are not to stand, that is continue or remain, in the ruts or the patterns of behavior which sinners live in. That means we are not to adopt the lifestyle of sinners. The psalmist makes this point so many times. Turn over to Psalm 119. Psalm 119:104. The psalmist says, “from Your precepts I get understanding. Therefore I hate every false

‘derek’”. Every false rut. Every false pattern of behavior. Verse 128, “Therefore I esteem right all *Your* precepts concerning everything. I hate every false ,, [rut—‘every false path’]”.

There are voices, even in the church of Jesus Christ today telling us that we should adopt the culture, even in the church, even the seedy and sinful, in the name of what’s called “contextualization”. You hear that word, you run from it. We are urged by some even in the evangelical community to choose behaviors that for 2000 years the church has understood to be in direct violation of the Scripture. However well-intentioned the motive of some may be, it’s “standing in the path of sinners.”.

But for us as individual Christians, there are other ways we can be tempted to stand in the path of sinners. Sadly, and I do say this with a great deal of sadness, there are people in this room. Undoubtedly, in a congregation this size there are people sitting in this room who faithfully attend this church, who perhaps even serve in this church, while all the time, constantly indulging in a secret life of shame. If you’re here this morning and you claim Christ, and you are hiding a life of pervasive increasing unrepentant sin, I plead with you, give glory to God. Repent of that sin. Seek God’s forgiveness. Talk to one of the elders or to some mature Christian who can help you. But for goodness sake, don’t stay in the rut. Don’t stay in the path of sinners.

Maybe you don’t have a secret life of shame, but if you’re honest with yourself, you’d have to say you’ve just gotten lazy in your Christian life. You don’t fight sin in your life the way you used to. You’re in a pattern of giving in and giving up. Listen to Jonathan Edwards, and take his advice. This was one of his resolutions. “Resolved: Never to give over nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may appear to be.” That’s good advice. It’s good counsel.

Jesus put it this way in Matthew 5. He said, “if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off.” Jesus wasn’t saying to physically maim yourself. You can’t deal with sin like that. Here’s what He meant. Jesus was saying, you must be willing to get radical in dealing with your sin. You must do whatever it takes to deal with the sin in your

life. If you're tolerating ongoing patterns of sin, habits of sin, then you are standing in the paths of sinners.

There's a third statement of what the happy righteous man does not do. Notice verse 1. He does not sit in the seat of scoffers. The counsel of the wicked has to do with our thinking. The path of sinners has to do with our behaving, and the seat of scoffers has to do with our belonging. The Hebrew word translated "scoffer" is a familiar word in the Proverbs. It describes those who were farthest from repentance; those who openly ridiculed and defiantly reject God and His laws. Paul told the Corinthians that we have to associate with unbelievers because we are in the world. But here the psalmist says that we aren't to sit in the seat of scoffers.

Now, in the Old Testament, seat sometimes refers to an actual seat. But sometimes, as here, it refers to an assembly. Whether an official assembly, or a social one. So, to sit in the seat of the scoffers means to connect ourselves to them, whether officially or socially, in such a way that we are one of them, that we belong. Scripture reminds us over and over again of how important this is. David, in Psalm 26 makes this affirmation.

I do not sit with deceitful men,
Nor will I go with pretenders.
I hate the assembly of evildoers,
And I will not sit with the wicked.

Psalm 119:115 says, "Depart from me, evildoers, That I may observe the commandments of my God." You and I must not belong with those who scoff at God and His Word.

What are some of the ways in which we are tempted to do so? Well, the most obvious one for most of us, is spending huge amounts of our waking hours reading, listening to, or watching those who openly repudiate and ridicule the Christian faith; all the way from secular talk radio to Oprah, and everything in between. Those who scoff and ridicule our Lord and our faith, ought not be the object of our waking hours. Attending schools and colleges where we sit at the feet of men who are known for undermining, challenging, or ridiculing the faith once for all delivered to

the saints. It's one thing to sit under an unbeliever. It's another thing to sit under someone who openly attacks the Christian faith. Belonging to or working in organizations whose reason for existence runs contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. There are many other ways as well. Listen, we cannot belong to the assembly, socially or officially, of those who scoff.

Now look at verse 1 again, because I don't want you to miss the main point the psalmist is making here. Notice the three nouns, wicked, sinners, and scoffers. Together, those nouns include all unregenerate men and women. You see, we tend to look at verse 1 and the groups mentioned there and think of them as small subsets of unbelievers. But, in fact, every unbeliever without exception is included in verse 1. So, the point then, in verse 1, is that the righteous man completely abandons every path of those who live in rebellion against God. In other words, he abandons every human way. He abandons thinking like they think, living like they live, and belonging where they belong. And if that's not your commitment this morning, then I can guarantee you that your life will never spiritually prosper by God's standard. As John Calvin put it some 500 years ago.

No man can be duly animated to the fear and service of God and to the study of His law, until he is firmly persuaded that all the ungodly are miserable, and that they who do not withdraw from their company shall be involved in the same destruction with them.

Listen, if you want to experience the righteous enviable life, then you must make two foundational commitments. First, you must abandon every human way.

And secondly, you must embrace only God's way.

Look at verse 2. But, (here's the contrast), "his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night." I love this, because the psalmist reduces his entire positive description of the righteous man to his response to the Bible. Derek Kidner writes, "The Psalm is content to develop this one theme, implying that whatever really shapes a man's thinking, shapes his life".

He talks about the law of God. The Hebrew word (you know this word) is “torah”. It’s a rich, multifaceted word. The basic sense of it is “instruction”. It is instruction in the Father’s will for His children. From early in Israel’s history, it was used in a variety of ways. The word torah was used to refer to a single command. It was used to refer to the Ten Commandments. It was used to refer to all of the Law given to Moses at Sinai, and it was even used to refer to all the Pentateuch. It eventually came to refer to the entirety of God’s revelation. So, this is the Torah of God. His entire word. The psalmist is saying here that you can identify a truly righteous life by how he responds to God’s way revealed in the Bible.

And notice how he responds, how the righteous man or woman responds. Verse 2, he delights in it. The word means to take pleasure in something, to experience emotional joy or delight. Ten times in the Old Testament, it’s translated as “desire”. There’s a wonderful picture of what this word means in Psalm 107. Just a few verses beyond where I read this morning. There’s the picture drawn there (the word-picture), of experienced sailors lost in a terrific storm. The worst storm of their lives, for days on the Mediterranean. And when they’re brought to the utter end of their resources, when they’ve exhausted all of their skills, they begin to delight in land, to delight in the harbor. If you can imagine what that experience would be like, and the joy and delight and pleasure you would take in finally arriving in a safe harbor. That is how we are to delight in the Word of God. The righteous man finds his pleasure, his happiness, his delight in the Bible. Job put it this way in Job 23:12, “I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”

Look at Psalm 119 again. Psalm 119. I just want you to see what a major theme this is. Psalm 119:14, “I rejoiced in the way of your testimonies, As much as in all riches.” Verse 24, “Your testimonies are my delight. *They are* my counselors.” Verse 35, “Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it.” Verse 47, “I shall delight in Your commands, Which I love.” Verse 72, “The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver *pieces*.” Verse 77, “... Your law is my delight.” Verse 97, “O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” Verse 143, “Trouble and anguish have come upon me, *Yet* Your

commandments are my delight.” Verse 174, “I long for Your salvation, O LORD, And Your law is my delight”

Now, I’ve read all of those texts to let you feel the weight of the psalmists love for the Scripture. Let me ask you; is that how you think about the Bible? Is that how you approach the Scripture? If the only day of the week you touch your Bible is Sunday, as you dust it off on the way to church, then I can guarantee you that you do not delight in the law of God. Or maybe you’re a more disciplined person by nature, or maybe you just have a guilty conscience if you don’t read the Bible, and so you make yourself spend a little time in the Bible most days. And that’s good. I don’t mean to discourage you from doing that. Continue to do that. But you can faithfully read the Bible, and do it solely out of duty, and not out of delight. But the righteous man delights, finds his pleasure, his joy, in the Scripture.

If you have to admit this morning that you really don’t find that kind of pleasure in the Word, how do you increase your delight in the Bible? There’s a simple answer. Spend more time in it. Jeremiah 15 says, “Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart.” By feasting on the Word of God, the Word became his joy and his delight. Or as Martin Luther put it, “The Bible is a remarkable fountain. The more one draws and drinks of it, the more it stimulates thirst.” You see, the Bible is like salt water, the more you drink, the thirstier you get. And yet, unlike salt water, every time you drink it, also satisfies your thirst. The happy, enviable, righteous man finds his greatest delight in the law of God.

Notice, there’s a second response of this enviable man to Scripture. Not only does he delight in it, but verse 2 says he meditates on it day and night. The word translated “meditates” here, originally described a kind of low murmur of the voice, as someone quietly read the Scriptures out loud, which is what they typically did in ancient times. Or quietly spoke to himself about it. It literally means “to mutter, to moan, to whisper”. But the main point of this Hebrew word is not what comes out of your mouth, but what happens on the inside. In fact, Psalm 49:3 contrasts the meditation of the heart with the words of the mouth. So, in the context of Psalm 1, then, the

word means “to reflect, to think, to have an internal discussion about” the Scripture. Meditation is deliberately choosing to think deeply about the Scripture.

And biblical meditation always has two goals in mind. First of all, to better understand the meaning of the text. You think about it to understand it. Meditation brings insight into the meaning of the text through illumination. We talked about this a lot in Ephesians 1. Paul prays for the Ephesians, “I pray the eyes of your heart may be enlightened”. He’s praying for illumination. God, open the eyes of the heart to see and understand the Scripture, and that happens in meditation.

I’ve used the illustration with you when we went through Ephesians 1 of that stained glass window that you look at night, and if you look at a stained glass window at night, you can make out all that’s there. You can make out the images that are there. You can understand it. But it makes no impact on you personally. But if you walk into that same cathedral in the blazing noonday light and you see the sun shining through that stained-glass window, it literally comes alive. It becomes real and beautiful and attractive. That’s what the Spirit does in illumination. He turns on the light behind the page, and God’s Word becomes real and beautiful and attractive and desirable. It changes our thinking and it affects our lives. That happens in meditation.

A second goal of meditation is not only to understand the text, but to apply the text. To plan how to do it. Joshua 1:8 says, “Meditate so that [or for this purpose] you may observe to do according to all that is written therein.” In fact, Psalm 2, the first verse of Psalm 2 uses the same Hebrew word that’s translated “meditate” in Psalm 1. But in the first verse of Psalm 2 it’s translated as “devising”. That is, creating a plan to carry something out. So, to meditate, then, is to think deeply about the Word of God in order to understand it, and to devise a plan to carry it out. And notice, verse 2 says the righteous man does this day and night. Whenever his mind is free, the righteous man’s mind goes back to the Scripture.

Here’s the test of whether you truly delight in the Bible or not. Do you meditate on it day and night? Are you a diligent student of the Bible? If you delight in it, guess what, you want to know what it says. Do you personally apply the Bible? We can be tempted to study the Bible in

a way that yields nothing more than a glorified book report. In a Bible church, we take in so much biblical data in the services and classes and various ways. We take in the Bible so that we become a lot like our computers. We store the life-giving truth in our database, but we are unaffected by it.

Over the last year my own life has been deeply affected by a quote by Johan Bengel. He wrote to pastors that this ought to be your approach to the Scripture as you're studying it. "Apply yourselves wholly to the text. That's study. And then, apply the text wholly to yourselves. That's application".

The righteous love the Law of God. They think about it all the time so that they can understand it and so that they can do it. They delight in it and they meditate on it. Folks, that is a reality to some degree in the life of every righteous person, and it is the goal that we all ought to continue striving for. But not one of us here this morning can say that we have completely abandoned every human way and embraced only God's way.

There is only one Man who has ever lived Psalm 1. Christ alone is the perfect pattern of the righteous man. He alone refused to walk in the counsel of the wicked, never stood in the path of sinners, and never associated Himself with scoffers. He alone delighted in the Law of God with His whole being every moment of His life and meditated on it day and night. And thank God, our righteousness is found in His righteousness.

But for us, Psalm 1 was stationed at the very entrance to the Psalms, and it calls on every person who would approach God in worship to make a choice: to make a choice between two ways. There is the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. There is the way of the Bible and there's every other way. Are you willing to abandon every human way, and to embrace only God's way?

Let me ask you this morning. What path are you on? Is it the path that's marked by Scripture, that leads to God's presence? Or is it the path of the wicked that leads only to destruction?

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for this powerful passage of Scripture. We thank You for its lessons to all of us. Lord, I pray for those here this morning who are truly embracing Your way as revealed in Your Word. They are endeavoring to walk according to the Scripture, to think biblically, to behave biblically, to associate with those who love You, and not to make their association with those who scoff and ridicule You. Father, I pray that You would encourage their hearts this morning. If their delight is in the Bible, if they take pleasure in Your word and in meditating on it, encourage their hearts.

Lord, for the rest of us who are believers, but of whom that cannot be said, give us a renewed passion to live the enviable life. Lord, create in our hearts a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and may Your word fill that hunger and slake that thirst.

Father, I pray for the person here this morning who is truly walking in the way of the wicked, who are heading on following human advice, heading down human paths to eventual destruction. Lord, I pray that today you would open their eyes. That You would help them to see that You have set before them two ways—only two, the way of the righteous, which is the way of the Bible, and the way of the wicked, which is every other way. Father, draw them to Yourself today.

We pray it in Jesus' name, and for His sake. Amen.