

Sunday 5th. November 2017

Psalm 1

The way of the godly.

The next two weeks I will be looking at the first and second Psalms. It is timely to look at a Psalm of two as it is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and the first Scriptures that Martin Luther began to lecture on was the book of Psalms. He began this work on the 1st of August 1513. Here is a taste of his opening words on verse 1.

'In the Hebrew, the word "blessed" is a plural noun, that is, all blessednesses are the portion of that man who has not gone away; as if were said "All things are well with that man who," etc If a man has found that pearl of great price, to love the law of God and to be separated from the ungodly, all blessednesses belong to that man;'

Luther was correct to regard the instructions and promises in this Psalm as pearls of great price, because in it, the path of godliness is clearly laid out for all to see and consider. The contrast between the godly person and the ungodly is stated in the most stark and dramatic fashion, and the Psalm easily leads us to recall related Scripture in the New Testament.

The psalm is, in the first instance, the considered wisdom of King David, but can easily be seen as similar to the teachings of Christ and the Apostles so adding to its richness and universal application.

It is interesting that both the beginning of the Book of Psalms, and the first recorded sermon of Christ, both begin with the promise of blessing. 'Blessed' is a word rich in meaning in Old Testament and New Testament usage. It could be translated as 'Happy' as in 'This is the happy man,' or 'This is the man to be envied.' It is a promise and a description of what God regards as all goodness.

The Psalm contains a description, negatively and positively, of the disposition and practice of a godly person. It then gives a description of how this man is in the world and in God's esteem, and the outcome of such a life.

The contrast then comes between the godly man and the wicked man who does not conduct himself in the same way. The contrast is stark and strong, and we could anticipate a godless, but moral person objecting to the description being given of their condition. However, the second Psalm has counsel for those who would disagree with the verdict of God. Someone may present a case before a Judge in a court, but the decision of the judge is final, so let any and all who wish to argue with God beware that contempt is not added to the charge sheet!

Verse 1. Blessed, to be envied, this is the truly happy man - there are three things that he does not do. He does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. This means that he is

careful who he, (for he take she as well) listens to and heeds. We all know that on the TV, the web and media there is a lot of rubbish, and much of it is dangerous rubbish. Something has only to be said often enough, or by an 'expert,' or a celebrity, and it is taken as fact. Have you ever read any of the conspiracy theories? You may or may not remember that for some time people visited Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh where Dan Brown set his book 'The Da Vinci Code', believing that there were all sorts of mysteries there! It is a real place, but it was used in a fictional book. There was a film a few years ago called, 'Salmon fishing in Yemen.' For some time people tried to book fishing holidays there, but guess what, it was a fictional film, there are no Salmon in Yemen except perhaps in tins! So, beware what we take as truth, if it is not Gospel Truth!

Paul in the Book of Romans says it very clearly. Romans 12 verse 2 says,

'Do not be conformed to this world – this age, fashioned after, moulded to, its external superficial customs.' Amplified Bible.

The picture is of an object being pressed into a mould to give it shape, like a jelly is poured into a mould to give it a shape. A better Biblical picture is that of the Potter, who throws the clay, and then uses the pressure of his hands to shape it into a vessel. Paul says that we are not to be shaped by the world, but shaped by Christ.

This is a very challenging piece of instruction in every age, and very much in our age when the forces of materialism, humanism, relativism have flooded our educational system, our culture and society, and every facet of living. For example, even in my lifetime the attitudes to debt and purchasing things has changed.

In times past, people saved up to buy a new table, or a fishing rod, or just about everything apart from a house, but even then, there were limits on how much you could borrow related to the husband's earnings. Not so now. Some of you may be in negative equity, and would be in real trouble if interest rates shot up to the levels I remember.

Even in much of the USA, Sunday is a different day of the week where less things happen. Over here, Sunday is the new Saturday, and if this does not bring Christian parents out to pray, I don't know what will! The sports coach and the shopping mall are now pastoring your children. It is serious and our children's souls are suffering for it, but what to do? The mould of the world is ever present and so powerful. We are now so used to it, that things that not long ago would not be dreamt of are now current currency.

It takes Biblically opened eyes to see the moulding of the world. Paul in Romans 6 verse 17 and 18 tells us the counter to this,

'... you have become obedient with all your heart to the standard of teaching in which you were instructed, and to which you were committed.' Amplified Bible.

In other words, it is by being shaped by the hands of the Potter that we escape from the mould of the world and the wicked. This is why it is so important to be in the Word and in the Church. I could demonstrate it from Scripture, but let me cut to the conclusion, if we are not shaped by the Word and Holy Spirit illuminating the Scripture, then we are certainly being pressed into and shaped by the world!

The next step away from God is to stand in the way of sinners. This means that as we are moulded by the world, we find ourselves more and more in agreement with the views and values of the world. A simple example of this is the way gender issues are getting so confused, and things that were once regarded as gifts and blessings are proclaimed as rights. This is essentially a denial of God's providences. The rampant materialism of our generation is accepted by most as the way to go. It has not always been so. The late John Wesley used to advise the Methodists to earn all they can, save all they can, and give all they can. When Wesley died, his estate was a few books and about 5 shillings in cash, but what a legacy he left the world!

Do you see that once moulded to the world, we begin to be set in the shape of the world, the clay dries and becomes less pliable – so beware!

The third negative is sitting in the seat of mockers. This condition is where the clay has become set hard, (and is ready to be put in the furnace to be fired!) This was the state that Pharaoh reached. His heart was utterly hardened and repentance was beyond reach!

We have mockers aplenty within the Church worldwide. There are those who want to rewrite the Bible removing the passages they deem to fail their tests of authenticity. There are others who wish to delete the passages that do not suit their desired view of life, and there are others who dismiss the entire history of God because, 'Evolution proves this and that.' I think that many who say the latter are not aware of the growing movement that holds to a view of Intelligent Design. They do not say God, but it is not a far cry for Christians to identify the intelligent designer as being God.

Can you see how prevalent the influence of this mould is? How can we avoid it?

This brings us to –

Verse 2

The godly soul is not pressed into the world's mould, but gives itself the Law of the Lord, the Scriptures. There is to be delight in this. Do we delight in God's word? We can only do so if it is the word of the Lord we know and love! We love the Word because of whose word it is. We delight in the Law of the Lord because it is His letter of love and instruction to us. It is the map to the treasure of a happy life and a blessed life. It illuminates the path to heaven. We want to go to heaven, not to avoid hell only, but because that is where our God and Saviour is, the lover of our souls. We delight in the Law of the Lord because it is the Law of love and life. As 1 John 5 verse 3 tells us that because we love God, His commands are not burdensome to us. This is what it means to delight in the Law of God. To do so because it is the Law of the one who loves us and

whom we love in return. Have you ever said to someone you love, 'I would do anything for you!' That is what this means!

Meditating day and night – impossible! Yes it is impossible to do 24/7, because we have many things to think about and concentrate on. There is no wisdom in driving along the road with closed eyes singing a hymn or chorus. That would not be a defense when had up for dangerous driving! What it means is this, that we do more than just read a passage and leave it at that. It means that our minds return to thinking about the Scriptures when we are not engaged in other things.

We are to read and think, to let the Scripture ask questions of us and we of it. We are to ask what is it saying, promising, warning of. Are there conditions, examples to follow or avoid? We are to stand beside it and see if we measure up. We are to believe it, so that it can comfort us, assure us, encourage us, warn us, correct or rebuke us. It can make us happy or sad. It can expose sin and assure of grace, but only if we take time, and as it were let the Holy Spirit warm it to us from the cold. God's speed is not our speed, we are hasty, He is thorough!

With the advent of fan assisted ovens and microwaves and precooked meals everything can be done fast. However, there are some meals that have to be slow cooked. We can grow a radish or lettuce in a few weeks, but a fruit tree or an oak takes time. Meditation requires that we take time. Read a passage of Scripture, and if nothing strikes us, move on or read on. However, if a verse or phrase draws our attention take time over it. What does it matter if it takes us a year to get the juice out of a verse! If God moulds it into our living and changes us, or imparts grace to us, it is well worth the time and effort spent. God is sculpting us, and that takes time, He wants to sculpt something beautiful, to make us Christ like.

Verse 3.

The man who does as stated, compare Ephesians 4 verse 22-24, is like a tree. Not just any tree, but one that has been planted, not a wild tree. It is only by the word that we find our calling and position in the Body of Christ, and calling and position will determine the giftings and graces that God will supply us with. A plumber does not arrive at our homes with wood saws and timbers that is the joiner's tools. A dentist does not carry a hack saw and copper pipe, but has the dental instruments. Our calling will be equipped by gifts of grace so that we produce the fruit that the tree has been planted to produce!

Not only is this tree planted by God, but it is watered and by implication, tended by God. Do you remember Paul's wonderful words in Romans 8? He says that all things work for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. The long and short of this is that God promises to tend those trees that He has planted.

Because of God's care and watering, we can be assured that we will produce fruit in season. Nature can teach us some things here. Have you ever seen a worried tree? Have you ever seen a tree that is anxious about not having leaves in winter, or crying

out that it is the end of the world when it is pruned? Never, I would venture! Trees grow and produce fruit with a graceful simplicity because it is their nature to do so.

By meditating on Scripture, letting the Holy Spirit make it living to us and in us, we are being changed from barren trees to fruitful trees! Our natures are made Christ like. If there is no transformation, and no walking in that transformation, then no matter what growth we appear to make, it will not be fruit that lasts. Sadly recent decades in the Church have seen so many plans, strategies, hopes and confident predictions that if we do this or that, then everything will be OK. It has not been OK!

Read the Bible and see how not living God's way worked out for the Israelites and for the Churches in Revelation! It didn't work out. Today we need to get back to the Scripture to have our thinking, values and priorities transformed to godly ones, not ones moulded by the world!

Just a word about 'prosperity.' This is not necessarily riches. It can be, but the prosperity it has in mind is to be rich in God! Let me remind us all, the clock is ticking and our lives are speeding towards a point fixed by God where we will either be declared godly or chaff. No matter how much stuff we gather in this life, it will only be our souls that go through death. All the stuff will be left to others who will probably put most of it in a skip and dump it! Better to keep our souls than gain the world. Jesus said that!

So far, we have been looking at how we invest in the highest part of our being, our eternal souls. Now we move on.

Verse 4

The contrast could not be clearer or more blunt. 'Not so the wicked.' The wicked are those who have been pressed into the worlds mould, and have not given themselves to the Scriptures and living after that fashion. Do not be confused or deceived, it does not matter what mould of the world we have been shaped by, if we are shaped by the world, and not the Potter, then we are in dangerous territory. We may have been moulded in a refined mould, or a moral one. We may be upstanding citizens in the eyes of the world, but if Christ has not moulded us, planted us, nurtured us, then we are in the camp of the wicked.

The wicked are like chaff which the wind blows away. God has no pleasure in such, it is good for nothing and its end is to be blown away and scattered. Chaff is the husk about the seed that gets separated from the seed usually by some form of threshing. It is no use except to be fit for burning.

Verse 5. And 6,

These verses tell us the outcome of the two manners of life spoken about in the Psalms. The godly, the righteous, will live forever, the wicked will be destroyed, forever.

The subject of heaven and hell has fallen out of favour with people today. Many consider it to be a story like the Bogey Man, used to scare little children to obedience, Others consider this subject to belong to a less enlightened age, and to a superstitious one at that! Others argue that they do not find such notions palatable, and anyway would a loving God really let anyone go to hell?

All I would do, is draw your attention to this, that Jesus spoke of hell, the Bible speaks of hell, and that there are many places in Scripture, which like Psalm 1, talk about the different fate of those who believe in and obey Christ, and those who do not. This is surely not a matter that we should gamble with or settle in our minds because someone has told us this or that notion. Even in this Psalm, we are being called to engage with Scripture and search out the truth, rather than depend on some bloke in the pub who doesn't believe!

Application

1. The wisdom of God and the instruction of God is contained in this Psalm as to what a godly life consists in, and how we are to respond, and specifically what to do to live a godly life.
2. There is nothing in this Psalm which is beyond anybody in this land to do. Even if you can't read, there are audio versions on the web. If you are not on the web, there are CD's of Scripture being read. Even if you have no means of playing these, there are people in the congregation who would read for you, and be glad to do so. So no excuse.
3. If we find that we have no desire to read and meditate on Scripture, then be aware that this is a dangerous sign. Start asking God to give you a desire for Him and His word, and like the importunate widow in Luke 18, keep at it until God gives you a desire for His word.
4. Take it to heart that it is about standing in God's judgment, not ours, so it is wise to pay attention to His criteria and not rely on our own thoughts.
5. Why risk losing our souls. Just do what we are told in verses 1-3.