

Psalm 1

1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

The word “blessed”, as in “blessed is the man”, means straight or right. A sheep of God is right or correct, and is living a straight (holding to a direct or proper course) life. Overall, his condition is a happy and desirable one. **Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! And thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.** (Deuteronomy 33:29). And of Solomon, a fair representative of our King, the queen of Sheba said it well: **Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom.** (1 Kings 10:8).

This blessed person is first described by contrasting with negatives – that is, ungodly, sinners and scornful. These three terms employed for evil have distinctive significations.

Ungodly: such are restless, wanting in self-control and victims of ungoverned passion, such as we read of in Isaiah 57:20-21 – **But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.** These ungodly people are wicked who wholeheartedly embrace all kinds and degrees of unrighteousness.

Sinners: The word here denotes those who miss the mark and err in their chosen path. It denotes any kind or degree of sin. These people fail in regard to the great end of life and regularly violate known obligations. These are wrong-doers. **Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men: in whose hands is mischief, and their**

right hand is full of bribes. (Psalm 26:9, 10). The people here described give up themselves to the power and practice of sin, making it their business and delight. Of such, Christ was given over to. **Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.** (Matthew 26:45).

Scornful: These are those that make a mock of sin and of God's threatenings and judgments against sinners and make it their trade to scoff at goodness and the Lord's chosen. The original word refers to those who mock, deride and scoff and treat virtue and religion with contempt and scorn. **How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? And the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?** (Proverbs 1:22). **A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke.** (Proverbs 13:1). We are well-advised to avoid the scornful, there's no gain in dealing with them. **He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.** (Proverbs 9:7, 8). Walk away!

Finally, we see the blessed man neither walks, stands nor sits with these damned members of humankind. These terms cover the posture of human beings in their active, daily stages. That is to say, when you're awake and functioning, you are either walking (includes running, jogging), standing or sitting. In short, this refers to a way of life and daily conduct. **And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and will keep my statutes and my judgments: Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever[.]** (1 Kings 9:4, 5). **Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.** (Psalm 15:1, 2).

This blessed man does not follow the advice and suggestions of such persons, does not execute their purposes and plans, and does not frame his life according to their views and counsel.

²But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

The Hebrew term translated “but” that begins this verse is an elliptical expression implying strong contrast to what we just read – “nay but”, or “on the contrary.” Verse one was written in the negative. The positive side of a good man’s character is now described.

And that description is two-fold:

1. His delight is in the law of the Lord. That is to say, his joy and happiness is in the study and practice of the whole word delivered by God to the church, consisting of doctrines, precepts, promises, commands and threatenings. **Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law[.]** (Isaiah 51:7).
2. He meditates in that law, day and night. “Meditates” implies a deep, serious and affectionate thoughtfulness. But it suggests more: A chattering, murmuring and growling – verbal expressions that are a part of your daily walk. **Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter: I did mourn as a dove [.]** (Isaiah 38:14). **For thus hath the Lord spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey [.]** (Isaiah 31:4). The phrase, “day and night”, speaks to the frequency, diligent nature and constancy of the meditation. This meditation is not seldom or slightly done. **This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.** (Joshua 1:8).

³And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Observe, we are still considering the blessed person first mentioned in verse one.

This man is happy and firmly planted, and produces fruit and flourishes in doing so, because he is located in proximity to streams of living water, that is, the word of God. **For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.** (Isaiah 44:3, 4). **Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.** (Jeremiah 17:7, 8).

Consider this thoughtful analysis by Barnes as it relates to these “rivers of water”: *The allusion is to the Oriental method of irrigating their lands by making artificial rivulets to convey the water from a larger stream, or from a lake. In this way, the water was distributed in all directions. The whole land of Egypt was anciently sluiced in this manner, and it was in this way that its extraordinary fertility was secured.* You will note the text speaks of “rivers” in the plural.

This passage reminds one of this great hymn: *Shall we gather at the river? Where bright angel feet have trod; with its crystal tide forever flowing by the throne of God. Yes, we'll gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river, gather with the saints at the river that flows by the throne of God.*

The blessedness this man possesses, straight from God, is not transitory or passing, as leaves on trees in nature, but is fixed and everlasting. His leaves do not wither by heat or drought and fall to the ground; instead, they are continually green and flourishing. **He is green**

before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden. (Job 8:16).

Ultimately, and finally, all of his actions and efforts will be crowned with success in one respect or another. Whatever he does shall prosper, principally in things spiritual, although this language need not be limited thereto. **Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.** (1 Timothy 4:8).

⁴The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Not so the ungodly, that is to say the condition of wicked men is far different than the blessed man we have been considering. Instead, like chaff, they will be winnowed out of the society of the true church by the fan of God's judgment. The Great Judge will **thresh the heathen in anger.** (Habakkuk 3:12). **Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision (threshing): for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.** (Joel 3:14). **For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the god of Israel; the daughter of Babylon is like a threshingfloor, it is time to thresh her: yet a little while, and the time of her harvest shall come.** (Jeremiah 51:33).

The idea here is that the ungodly are in no respect like the green and fruitful tree referred to in Psalm 1:3 just covered. In fact, they are not like a tree at all. They are not even like a decaying tree, or a dead tree, or a barren tree, because these convey some idea of permanency or stability. Instead, they are like dry and worthless chaff, driven off by the wind.

This wheat winnowing process is interesting. It is generally performed in an open field, on a hilly spot where the wind reaches it the most, by throwing up the grain as it is threshed by a shovel. The wind naturally scatters the chaff while the grain falls to the ground. As you see, the wind drives or blows the chaff away.

Benson nicely sums up all this with these remarks: *Withered and worthless, restless and unquiet, without form or stability, blown about by every wind, and, at length, finally dispersed from the face of the earth, by the breath of God's displeasure, and driven into the fire which never shall be quenched. Their seeming felicity hath no firm foundation, but quickly vanishes, and flies away, as chaff before the wind.*

One final insightful aspect to the picture here painted. Those described here are like chaff that are of no value to the farmer – a substance which he is anxious to separate wholly from his grain and to get out of the way. The idea thus presented is one of intrinsic worthlessness. So Barnes tells us: *It will be among other things, on this account that the wicked will be driven away – that they are worthless in the universe of God – worthless to all the purposes for which man was made.*

⁵ Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

On the sure-to-come judgment day, the ungodly will not rise; that is to say, they will not be able to hold their heads up because of self-conviction that will cause them to shrink away before God's unerring scrutiny. Indeed, on that day, they will be speechless, like the man without a wedding garment in our Lord's parable found at Matthew 22:11, 12: **And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.** He was speechless; nothing to be said, nothing that can be said – no reply. (Without getting too far afield, that term “friend” troubled me. Upon review, it seems that term probably suggests a companion rather than a true friend, or someone who professed to be a friend of Christ, making the salutation ironic.)

“Shall not stand” also suggests such persons will not be found among those that are acquitted by the Judge of the Universe. And the time or occasion at issue here is “the judgment”, suggesting that great and general judgment of the whole world. Indeed, the original language

would be properly paraphrased “in the great day” or that single, solitary occasion of profound and final judgment rendered by God.

Similarly, we learn here that sinners shall not stand in the “congregation of the righteous.” This congregation is made up of the sheep on the right hand of the Son of man as he sits on the throne of his glory. **And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.** (Matthew 25:33). Those in this blessed congregation are made righteous by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, and have a work of holiness and grace wrought in them and therefore and thereby live soberly, righteously and godly.

Sinners have no place in this congregation. As Barnes writes: *[I]n all the places where the righteous, as such, are assembled, they shall have no place: where they assemble to worship God; where they meet as his friends; where they unitedly participate in his favor; when, in the last day, they shall be gathered together to receive their reward, and when they shall be assembled together in heaven. The sinner has no place in the congregations of the people of God.*

Reminding you of the various ways this message appears throughout the Bible, among this ages old assembly of the righteous, there will not be a single unrepentant sinner: there are no sinners in Zion, foolish virgins with the wise, chaff and tares among Christ’s wheat, and wolves and goats among his sheep. There will be no mixing together throughout eternity. **And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.** (Matthew 25:46).

⁶For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

The Lord knoweth; that is to say, he recognizes with discriminative discernment and appreciation. **And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had (knew) respect unto them.** (Exodus 2:25). R-E-S-P-E-C-T! **Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him!** (Psalm 144:3). While here, Christ said it: **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me[.]** (John 10:27).

As he searcheth the reins and the heart, and perfectly knows all his people, so he approves, loves, and delights in them, and in their conduct and conversation, and therefore will recompense them[.] (Benson). There is no faking this; God knows the sincere, whatever pretences others may make. *Only those whom God approves, and loves, as his friends, will be able to stand in the day when the great decision shall be made. No one can impose on him by any mere pretensions to piety; no one can force his way to his favor, or to the rewards of the just, by power; no one can claim this in virtue of rank and station. No one can be admitted to the favor of God, and to the rewards of heaven, whose character is not such that it will bear the scrutiny of the Omniscient eye.* (Barnes). **Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.** (2 Timothy 2:19). And think of this: **I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.** (Hosea 13:5). This language in this verse bespeaks affection, love and approval. **You only have I known of all the families of the earth[.]** (Amos 3:2).

Contrarily, the way of the ungodly shall perish. The desires, plans and ambitions of God-haters shall come to naught. The word “way” is used to denote the whole of life. Job describes this unjust course, describing it as a stream that suddenly dries up and disappears. **My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away; which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: what time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place. The paths of their way are turned aside; they go to nothing, and perish.** (Job 6:15-18).

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen. (2 Corinthians 13:14).