

Psalm 1—Divergent Paths and Destinations

Psalm 1 was most likely written by David as an introduction to Psalm 2 concerning the rebellion of mankind and God's resultant plan of reconciliation through His Son. Psalm 1 teaches the doctrine of the two ways, two paths, or two roads that mankind may take in their journey through life. It is interesting that the biblical perspective is that there are only two choices---God's way or man's way. Religious leaders and philosophers may try to convince you that there are many ways, or even that it doesn't matter which way as long as you are good. Nevertheless, the Bible is very clear that from God's perspective there are only two ways, His way and all other ways lumped together.

Jesus summed up His longest recorded sermon, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, by teaching that there are only two gates and two ways (Matt.7:13-23). The narrow gate and the way less traveled leads to the kingdom of heaven, but the wide gate and the crowded way leads to destruction. The narrow gate seems restrictive, so most will choose the wide gate that leads to Broadway Avenue. Broadway is the path of least resistance that appears right to man. There are many appealing "false prophets" that are leading the majority to Broadway by telling them a very positive message that they want to hear. In this conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wraps it up by giving His audience the choice of ways by using a series of contrasts between two gates, two roads, two trees, two houses, and two foundations (Matt.7:13-29). The Apostle John summed it up very nicely in 1 Jn.5:11-12, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life".

Psalm 1

In this short psalm, the author contrasts two kinds of people, two ways of living, and two destinies. I take it that this is a divine evaluation of the human race. In verse 1-2 we can see the contrasting images of the two kinds of people. The lifestyle of the godly does not follow the teaching of the wicked, hang out in evil places or with evil people. The godly do not side with those who mock God. This is done with false teaching, disobedient living, profane speech or actions---in short, unbelievers who do things their way. We could call v.1 "the power of negative thinking" because of the way the psalmist portrays it, "does not walk...does not stand...does not sit". By way of contrast in v.2, the godly delight in God's Word and God's prescribed way of living. In English it is translated "God's law". This perplexes many who wonder how anybody could delight in a bunch of rules, but in Hebrew the word is Torah which was used for the first five books of the Bible, therefore he is referring to the whole of God's revelation to Moses. Ultimately he is talking about the person who delights in meditating on and knowing God and His will. The godly people delight in and are blessed by knowing God's Word, God's way, and what God desires them to do.

The effective method the psalmist used was known as parallelism which is the repeating the same thing in a different way in two linked lines. In v.1 you have three linked lines repeating the same truth of blessing to those who don't "walk", "stand", or "sit" with the

“wicked”, “sinners”, or “scoffers”. Why would anybody follow the wicked sinners? Keep in mind that this is from God’s perspective not man’s. The counsel, path, and seat actually have the appearance to the worldly of wisdom, pleasure, and security. Paul said it well in 2 Cor.11:14-15, “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness”. The worldly way seems exciting, pleasurable, and prosperous, but it is the way of emptiness and frustration.

In v.2 we might expect the godly man to be described by way of his associations, but he is described as being delighted in the Word of God which he meditates on, and through which he is blessed by God.

Bearing Fruit for God

Verse 3-4 contrast two images of two ways of living and the results of those ways. The godly person is likened to a fruitful tree well planted in good soil next to clean water which yields much fruit. According to this image, if you are living for the Lord, in everything you do you will prosper. In the contrast in v.4, the unbeliever is compared to chaff blowing in the wind. They are lightweights, and have no permanence. This is the image of the threshing floor at harvest time. The grain is separated from the stalk, but still is surrounded by the worthless chaff. They would crush it and throw it into the air so that the heavier grain fell, but the lightweight chaff blew away in the wind. Unbelievers are like chaff in that they have no permanence or substance.

God Knows Who Is Who

Make no mistake about it, God knows who is who. He knows the grain from the chaff. Unfortunately, we as people don’t always know---we are terrible judges. In His parable in Matt.13 of the wheat and the tares, Jesus even commanded us to not try to make those judgments, but to wait and allow Jesus to separate the wheat from the tares when He comes back to judge the world. Nevertheless, rest assured that the “wicked” (in God’s sole view) will not be able to “stand” in that judgment, meaning that they will not be able to justify themselves. In the concluding verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 1, God guarantees justice. Appearances are deceiving now to us, but God knows. Solomon wrote in his Proverbs, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to destruction.” Here we find two destinies for two different kinds of people.

I’m Making My List

You may be thinking way out ahead of me, and trying to decide who the different people contrasted in Psalm 1 are. Who is the “blessed man” and who is the “sinner”? Who is the fruit yielding tree and who is the chaff? Who are the righteous and who are the wicked?

When we start making these judgments we must remember that Jesus Himself associated with known sinners, and when He was asked why, He replied that healthy people don’t need doctors, only the sick need doctors. In the same way, Jesus’ purpose statement was

that He came to give His life as a ransom to redeem sinners. The Pharisees went away perplexed at these statements, but we the student studying the Gospels realize that Jesus was saying that the Pharisees were only self-righteous. They were not righteous in God's eyes. If you doubt this just read Matt. 23 where Jesus pronounces a series of "Woes" on the Pharisees with a climatic statement in verse 33, "you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?" Therefore, by saying that He came to save sinners, we find that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God", and so all of us need God's grace to be saved.

Well, you say, it is obvious who the good people are and who the bad people are. We have them all sorted out in our mind, but let us just review all the biblical characters that we normally regard as righteous: Abraham was disobedient and went to Egypt, lied, sold his wife, then came back and had a child with the slave from Egypt, Hagar. Jacob's very name came to mean deceiver as he lied to and tricked his father and brother. Then Jacob was married to four wives at the same time. Judah married an evil idol worshipping Canaanite, and Judah was a regular visitor to pagan prostitutes. Moses was a murderer. Gideon was polygamous and led Israel into idolatry. David committed adultery and murder. In the New Testament, Paul murdered Christians, and wrote of himself that, "I am the foremost of all sinners". Space prohibits me from reviewing the lives of all the characters, but needless to say they were not righteous in and of themselves. They were righteous in God's eyes as the Bible says in Romans 4:3-8, "Abraham believed God, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness", and David was forgiven by God and declared righteous because of his belief in God. The only way any of us have the righteousness that God requires is through faith as Paul wrote in Phil.3:9, "I have no righteousness of my own, but I have a righteousness which is through faith in Christ".

Seeking, Serving, and Knowing

The first time I read Ps.1, it seemed very legalistic to me. At first I thought he was saying that the righteous only went to the right places and hung out with the right people. It sounded like they did nothing but study God's laws all day or do good works. Upon further review, I realize David couldn't have been talking about himself (or anybody else) if this were true. Therefore, the two kinds of people in Ps.1 are believers who respond to God's grace, and unbelievers who do not. This is perfectly consistent with Jesus' teaching in Matt.7.

David was painting a picture of what believers and unbelievers look like. Believers do not participate in the wicked lifestyle of unbelievers. Instead they delight in God's Word, and desire to study it. Believers yield good fruit for the Lord through their service. The destiny of believers is to be judged as righteous by God based on the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Unbelievers delight in the things of this world while believers look forward to the things God has in store for them in Heaven. Through their seeking and serving the Lord, the righteous come to know God as they abide in a relationship with God. After digesting this Psalm about the 2 men, the 2 ways, and the 2 destinies, we are now prepared to study Ps.2, so read ahead. **CHARLIE TAYLOR**