

The Book of
Psalms
The Heart of the Word

BOOK I: PSALMS 1–41

Kevin Swanson



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PSALM 1

Category: Didactic (Teaching) ~ Occasion: Defining Believers

Author: Unknown

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.

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

3 And 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.

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

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

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

The Point:

There are two kinds of people in this world and the differences are marked by their perspective of God's Word, their relationship with God, and their final end.

How do we feel in the recitation of this psalm?

We delight in the law of God, which means that we are excited about it. We feel the close presence of God as we read His Word. For it is only those who love the Word that are known and loved by God.

What does this psalm teach us?

Verse 1. Two kinds of people are defined and contrasted in this psalm: the ungodly and the righteous. This categorization will be repeated throughout Psalms, and later, in the New

Testament, Jesus Himself distinguishes the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares, and the wise and foolish virgins.

The psalmist begins with a flat, unequivocal statement—the righteous are blessed. What a beautiful way to begin the first psalm! We are a blessed people if we are the ones who do not take counsel from the ungodly. That is, we do not take on the ideas of the ungodly and walk in those ideas. Here the psalms introduce two different ways or walks in life, another pattern you will find in almost every psalm. You can walk in the way of the ungodly or you can walk in the way of God. Ungodly teachers give us their way of life when they teach us on television programs or in today's schools and colleges. But the righteous man does not walk in this counsel. And neither does he stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful. From the book of Proverbs, it is clear that a scornful person is one who is rebellious and will not listen to counsel and refuses to be corrected by the Word of God. This exactly fits the picture of the rebellious teenager or the teacher that refuses to teach the fear of God. A blessed man will be careful not to listen to these scornful, rebellious men. He does not conform to the scornful (other rebellious young people), or their rebellious habits and attitudes. He refuses to sit in the schools of those that are rebellious to God, to be taught unrighteous ways of thinking and living. While the godly man may hear ungodly suggestions now and then, he would process them according to the principles of God's Word.

Verse 2. The way of God is laid out in the words of the law of God, and the godly man or woman is defined as one who delights in the law of the Lord. Some children get excited about watching a movie or visiting an amusement park. But what really delights the heart of the righteous man is the law of God. When he hears what God says, he receives God's will for his life—laws which tell him to honor his father and mother, or to be kind to others, or to forgive those who offend him. He appreciates those words, embraces those words, and lives by them.

Moreover, the godly man meditates on God's law day and night. His focus is not on the ideas of the ungodly. Our minds wander to many different things throughout the day, but what are the things upon which our minds really focus? A godly man will continually think upon the law of God day and night.

Verse 3. Here is a beautiful verse that describes the blessed state of the righteous man who loves God's law and meditates on it both day and night. He will prosper like a tree planted by a river. Have you ever been out on the plains of Colorado or Oklahoma where there is very little vegetation? As you drive down the highways through these states, you will occasionally come upon a river or creek bed. You can generally identify the outline of the waterway by the trees that grow in the water. These trees grow strong and tall because they are fed by the water flowing in the creeks. Likewise, we will grow strong and tall spiritually as we are constantly fed by the Word of God.

God's Word provides life. Wherever God's Word is read and loved, you will find life. True life. Spiritual life. Over years of nourishment from the Word of God, you will see a little sapling turn into a large, beautiful, green tree, bearing fruit and often seeds that will produce even more trees. God promises prosperity to this man who delights in His law - prosperity in all he puts his hand to do. While this may include financial prosperity, there are more important kinds of prosperity than just wealth. Even the martyrs produced lasting accomplishments affecting thousands of years of God's kingdom and hundreds of generations. Their lives continue to produce fruit, even after their deaths.

Verses 4–6. Now the psalm brings in the contrast of the wicked. The ungodly are like the dust on the driveway that blows away and the righteous are like the concrete that stays there. According to Jesus' story about the house built on the sand, the ungodly are like the house that comes tumbling down when the storms come. That is because they will not listen to the words of Jesus in the Bible, and they will not build their lives on His Word. The ungodly will be judged by God, and

they will perish in hell. On the other hand, Yahweh knows the righteous. This means that He has a relationship with the righteous and takes careful note of them. His hand is close by, always guiding, directing, correcting, and blessing His people along the way, for their good and for His glory.

How do we apply this psalm?

1. Where your mind's eye sets itself is the direction in which you will walk. If our minds are filled with fiction novels, movies, music, and worldly ideas that have little to do with the law of God, we will live by these things. But if the core content of our thoughts consists of the Word of God, then we will live out that Word. So, let us meditate on the things we pick up from the Word throughout the day.

2. If we are going to avoid the way of the rebellious and the ungodly then we must be very careful how much time we spend listening to these men and women who obviously do not fear God. This must include our use of the television or ungodly teaching that we might find at a college or university. As a family, we must commit to walk as the righteous man and avoid the way of the rebellious and ungodly.

How does this psalm teach us to worship God?

Our worship must be based solidly upon the Word of God. Our thoughts in worship must be set by the truth of God's Word. Inevitably, churches tend to wander from God's Word, and in the end, they give way to compromise and worship some other god of their own making. You will always recognize solid worship when the preaching, the songs, and the prayers are filled up with the truths that come directly from the pages of the Bible. The true worshiper of God will delight in the sermon, especially if the sermon consists of rich portions of God's Word and a good explanation and application of it.

Questions:

1. Give an example of a Didactic psalm.
2. According to this psalm, what are the differences between the righteous and the wicked?
3. What is a scornful person?
4. If the ungodly are like the dust that blows off the concrete in our driveway, what are the godly like?
5. How do the righteous gain spiritual strength?

Family Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the ways we may walk in the ways of the ungodly or sit in the seat of the scornful?
2. Do you love the Word of God? Do you love to sit and listen to the Bible as we read it? Do you love to hear the Word of God preached? How much do we think about God's Word throughout the day? Are you learning to focus on the law of God?

PSALM 2

Category: Messianic ~ Occasion: Kings Rebel

Author: David (Acts 4:25)

1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against His anointed, saying,

3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

5 Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure.

6 Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion.

7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art My Son: this day have I begotten thee.

8 Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.

9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron: Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

10 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.

11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.

The Point:

Jesus is the King over Zion (the church) and over all the earth, and the kings and judges of the earth had better recognize His kingship.

How do we feel in the recitation of this psalm?

At first we are taken back by the animosity the heathen kings and rulers of America, Europe, and Asia express towards Yahweh, the Creator of heaven and earth. But as the psalm progresses, we begin to laugh at the antics of these mice-like kings who think they can stand up against God. With confidence, we direct the President of the United States and the Supreme Court Justices to kiss the Son and serve the Lord with trembling. In short, we are thrilled at the sovereign might of the Lord our God; and as well, we are shocked by the foolish rebellion of the nations.

What does this psalm teach us?

Verses 1–3. Powerful kings and rulers try to fight against God. We see this every time kings of the earth defy God and His holy law. Every time they rule against the standards of God's holy law and condemn innocent babies to death, or refuse to administer God's laws against the wicked, they set themselves against God. Occasionally, wicked governments and human institutions will conspire against God and against His anointed One, and His body, the church. You may remember that the New Testament

name “Christ,” is literally translated, “the Anointed One.” In the prayer recorded in Acts 4:25–28, the Apostle applies this very passage to the actions taken against the Lord Jesus Christ by the leaders of Rome and the Jews at the crucifixion. Throughout history, wicked kings and rulers have continued this opposition to Christ when they have dedicated themselves to the persecution of His body, the church.

Political, academic, and business leaders in our day still persecute Christians for opposing the sin of homosexuality or for rejecting evolution. Consider also Christians in North Korea, Pakistan, or China who are verbally derided and even tortured for their faith in God and His Christ.

Verses 4–5. Now we have God’s reaction to these little kings that shake their fist in the sight of God, their Creator. He laughs. Of course, if God made these little kings then any opposition they might rally against their Creator is futile. But why does God respond in laughter? For the same reason that we might respond in laughter when we see a mouse attack an elephant. Incongruity like this is what makes things funny. In this case, the laughter is not an endearing laugh as we might laugh when a little two year old says something funny, but it is more of a deriding, satirical laugh. Moreover, God’s reaction to such rebellion is more than laughter. He speaks to them in wrath and brings them never-ending trouble that brings great distress to their lives.

Verses 6–9. Up to this point we have heard of the kings of the earth that have set themselves in rebellion against God. Now, Yahweh Himself introduces another King whom He has set up on Mount Zion. We interpret Zion to mean the church because Hebrews 12:22–23 clearly equates Mount Zion to the church of the Firstborn, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. Note also that the psalmist calls Mount Zion a holy hill. This church is holy, or set apart, to God. In fact, members of the church in the New Testament are called saints or “holy ones.”

Following up in verses 7 through 9, Yahweh God addresses His Son whom He has made King. He promises Him the whole world for His kingdom. But didn't the whole earth already belong to God? How would this kingdom of God's Son be any different from the rule God already holds over the whole world? Psalm 110 also speaks of the kingly reign of this King, who makes His people willing in the day of His power. The rule of Christ begins in the hearts of individual men, women, and children. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, He regenerates hearts, renews spiritual vitality, and transforms lives to obey His laws and render glad worship to Him.

Verse 9 points out that this kingdom is more than mercy—it is also judgment. Throughout the dark centuries of human history, wickedness and gross injustice has persisted unchecked by righteous rule. As this King ascends His mighty throne, He brings swift judgment upon those who refuse to serve Him. Consequently, atheistic governments (such as that which governed Russia in the 20th century), barely last for eighty years. The power of modern empires like France, Spain, and England dissipated quickly when they turned away from God in self-sufficient pride. Our King really rules. He will break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Verses 10–12. Kings and judges beware! The last verses consist of a warning for those who rule in Washington DC, London, and Tokyo. The most important biblical qualification for those who would be elected king or appointed a judge in the earth, is that they fear God (Ex. 18:21; 2 Sam. 23:3). We ought never to elect a man who does not serve God with fear and rejoice with trembling.

These kings are told to kiss the Son or perish. When one kisses a king, he confesses his love and appreciation for that king and his willingness to serve and obey that king. What is commanded here is not a shallow belief that many "Christians" claim in regards to Jesus, but rather an allegiance, a love, and an obedience.

How do we apply this psalm?

1. This psalm clearly reminds us that we must bow the knee before our Lord and King, Jesus Christ. Let us bow the knee to the Son today (Phil. 2:9–11). We are told here to serve Yahweh with fear and rejoice with trembling. Fear and rejoicing are compatible when we are walking in the fear of God.
2. As we get the opportunity, we should warn the most powerful people in our world to bow the knee to Jesus Christ, serve Him, and keep His commandments. Moreover, it is absolutely essential that we as Christians elect leaders that fear God, because we have the certain Word of God in this passage that He will destroy kings and nations that refuse to fear Him. Why should we contribute to the destruction of our nation by electing leaders who refuse to fear God?

How does this psalm teach us to worship God?

1. Our worship must contain these declarations of the kingly rights of Jesus Christ. And it is quite appropriate to apply these declarations to our own leaders or even to those of other nations such as China, Pakistan, or Iran.
2. We worship God with both reverent fear and rejoicing. Do we tremble and shake in worship with the saints on Sunday? Do we have such an awe of His power, majesty, justice, and love? As we see nations destroyed at the hand of our King we should stand in awe of His terrible judgment that comes upon those that will not kiss the Son and recognize His kingship.

Questions:

1. Give an example of a Teaching psalm.
2. Give an example of a Messianic psalm.
3. Why does God laugh at these rulers?
4. Who is this King that God has appointed over the whole earth?
5. If our King rules from a place called Mount Zion, what is this place?