

4 addresses on 3 Psalms

Part 2

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[00:00:00] In turn please to the book of Psalms, Psalm 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. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 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. [00:01:04] The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

It is with good reason that the book of Psalms is frequently termed the heart of the Bible.

In it often we see the heart of man at full stretch.

[00:02:03] In them, in the Psalms, we have revealed to us the heart of God.

This is plainly so because they detail for us the responses, the feelings, of those who here upon earth are experiencing difficulties, disappointment, disillusion.

And in their present distress, very often it is evident that there is only God that they can turn to. Very often it is for this reason that we are brought to an extremity of soul, in order that the only true supply of strength and solace might be before us.

[00:03:03] And it is because of this we so frequently turn to the Psalms because they mirror or parallel our own experiences and we see in them things which strike a chord with the way we feel at any given moment.

And in particular, it is in the midst of often painful experiences here upon earth that those who seek to be true to God and faithful to God in an adverse world learn lessons, learn more about themselves and learn more about God.

And it is for this reason too that in the ultimate very often we are let into the secret of what it felt like for the Lord Jesus [00:04:05] to be betrayed, forsaken, misunderstood, abused, misjudged, misrepresented and it is as we browse through the Psalms that we can have revealed to us the pure

thoughts of Christ himself.

Now, in looking at the Psalms which give us, perhaps we could sum up what we have said by saying they give us the fruit of experience in going through a variety of circumstances in company with God, that as we go through them we begin to see that really it is not just one book, it is an omnibus of five books in one. [00:05:08] Bearing in mind that they formed originally part of the canon of Hebrew Scripture we needn't be surprised to find that like the five books of Moses the book of Psalms falls into five major sections.

The first 41 Psalms correspond in content, in summary form they are very parallel to the first book of Moses, the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings. The second book of Psalms from 42 to 72 correspond very much with the book of Exodus the book which tells us about the people going out, being delivered from the tyranny of the oppressor [00:06:05] and going out towards the wilderness. The third book of Psalms from Psalm 73 to 89 correspond with the book of Leviticus and they tell us very much about sanctuary experience in wilderness conditions what it's like to go into God, to draw near to God even while still in this world. And the fourth book of Psalms corresponding very much with the book of Numbers from Psalm 90 to Psalm 106 then the rest 107 to 150 following the pattern of the book of Deuteronomy.

Now as to structure that becomes more plain the more often, the more regularly we read the Psalms. I was very much helped when I first began to read the Psalms [00:07:01] when a mature Christian advised me that in line with the first five books of Moses the first book Genesis, the first book of Psalms is very much the seed plot of all God's major plans. All the major things that God has to teach us are shown in the first book of Psalms. The second book of Psalms like the book of Exodus is very much the Levite's guide, the major structure. The third book like Leviticus is very much the priest's guide. The book of Numbers the warrior's guide and the book of Deuteronomy the people's guide. Now having set that out as the structure closely is of course Psalm 1 is at the beginning of the first book of Psalms.

[00:08:02] And like the book of Genesis it gives us the beginnings of all that God has to show us. And if what we've said about the book of Psalms as a whole is true and I'm sure it is we will find the beginnings of an outline of what it means to be here in the world which hates God and is opposed to God and what it means to feel along with God, what it means to be distinct and separate from the world. And so we'll be looking a little at that. Something to look forward to in our private studies if we start looking at the first 41 Psalms, the first book of Psalms. We'll find that difficult days are described, difficult conditions, difficult circumstances and the intensity of the feeling of any godly person who is determined to be true to God whatever else is going on [00:09:11] even if it means swimming against the tide. And we'll be looking for some features of this in Psalm 1. If we remember in the book of Genesis from the outset we get people like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph who are evidently God's man in an evil day.

And this is the kind of thing that comes through also in the first book of Psalms. Of course all the way through the scripture doesn't say man or woman. It's said, it's put in the male case but it's just as difficult for a woman to be set for God in an evil world. [00:10:07] It's just as necessary for a woman to be here set for God and to be determined to be faithful to God as it is for a man. And so while we say that the scripture is plain that it tells us about the character of a man for God in an evil day it is just as plainly the moral character of a woman or a girl who is determined to be faithful to the God who has provided such a saviour as our Lord Jesus Christ. And so we come to Psalm 1.

If we want to follow through God's comment on the life of those faithful men in the book of Genesis read God's summary of what he puts to their credit, puts to their account in Hebrews chapter 11. [00:11:05] Now we come to Psalm 1.

Now many of the Psalms have a heading. Unlike the other books in the Bible the headings of the Psalms are part of the inspired text. It's not an attempt at a summary by someone later on who's tried to be sympathetic with what is being said and very often, very close to the mark, in the book of Psalms it is part of the inspired text and therefore warrants greater merit, greater study than headings in any of the other books. Now Psalm 1 does not have a heading and for a very good reason. In all the other Psalms you have an opening statement in each Psalm.

[00:12:02] Even if there is an inspired heading to the Psalm the first verse is very often a summary of the content of the Psalm followed by an exposition of that which the first verse summarises.

But when we come to the first Psalm we find that it's not like that, not quite and for this reason. The first Psalm in itself is a summary of the whole book of Psalms.

It's also an introduction to the first book of Psalms, the first 41.

It's also an introduction or a heading or a title to the first section of the first book of Psalms, the first eight Psalms. So whether you take the first eight Psalms, the first 41 or the whole of the 150, Psalm 1 is an introduction and a summary [00:13:09] of all that God intends us to learn in the whole book of the Psalms. Now again by way of an introductory study into Psalm 1 there are several ways in which we can get help from Psalm 1 and many of the others. We can look at it as it was actually written by David, like most of the other Psalms, written by David and the experience that he gained of God and the knowledge he gained of himself and the knowledge of what is according to God in very difficult experiences in this life. That's looking at it actually. Then again and excuse the term, we can look at it empirically. [00:14:07] In this sense it describes the sort of man, it describes the kind of man that God is looking for and speaking in a general way without identifying a particular specific person.

That leads us on of course to say that while Psalm 1 is not specifically messianic, I'll come back to that, there's no doubt it's true that there is no person ever lived upon earth that exemplified the character that's described in Psalm 1 better or anywhere near as well as the Lord Jesus Christ himself. [00:15:01] Now that's a little different to saying that the Psalm is messianic. Some of the Psalms are evidently written with the intent that they describe in advance prophetically things that could only be true of the Lord Jesus Christ when he came into the world, when he lived in the world, when he went out of the world by way of Calvary, when he was raised by the glory of the Father, when he was set on high, his character as exalted, a Prince and a Saviour and his character as coming again to take up the reins of government. Now there are Psalms which specifically foretell exactly the Lord Jesus Christ in one of those offices or characters.

[00:16:04] But Psalm 1, I would again suggest, is not quite like that. It tells us of the kind of person that God is looking for in a godless, faithless world, exemplified more fully in Christ than in anyone else, but open to all those who here in this world set themselves for God and that is just a little different. Now we've looked then at the Psalm actually. Historically that is.

We've looked at it in a general way empirically. We've looked at it morally in the sense that Christ is the one who lives it out more fully than anyone else ever will or ever could. But we can also look at it

dispensationally.

[00:17:02] This present age will come to an end when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again for his own.

He has said, I will come again and receive you unto myself.

And when he does, at that very moment, when he descends from heaven with a shout, when the dead in Christ shall be raised and those alive in Christ shall be changed, at that moment this dispensation comes to an end and then for a few years after that, probably just a little more than seven years, there will be the opportunity for a small proportion of the nation of Israel to exhibit the same features that are listed in Psalm 1 [00:18:09] as were seen perfectly in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ when he was here living the life of the perfect Jew. And of course when we touch on scriptures like this, we cannot fail to see that in this short period before the coming of the Lord, it's open to us as Christian believers to act morally in a way which lines up exactly with the things that are said in Psalm 1.

Now having said that, I'd like to go back to the second way of looking at the psalm, listing for us the features, the moral character of one who is set for God [00:19:06] in a difficult and disobedient world, particularly in the time when Christ the Son of God has been disowned and rejected.

And so we look at Psalm 1. It's not a bad thing, you know, when we are really keen to get into the detail of a scripture. It's a good thing. Well, we're going to look at things negatively and positively. As an illustration of that, I might say in a negative way, it's not a bad thing to get a scripture in its context before you examine the detail. Positively, I'll say it is a good thing, a very good thing, to spend a little time, to stand back from the detail, see where it fits into the canon of scripture and then we'll get more sense from the text [00:20:02] when we look at it, as we hope to do now. Now, verse 1 has a negative outline. Verse 2 has a positive emphasis.

Now, that's fairly simply understood from the text. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly and does not stand in the way of sinners and does not sit in the seat of the scornful.

Starts off by a reference to behaviour, the way that we live. The first thing that strikes me about this is the progress or regress of the movements.

[00:21:08] Someone is walking, they slow down and they stand motionless and then they sit. You will have heard the term, if you don't go forward, you will go back.

It's the same kind of statement as this, isn't it? If those who are set for God are not intent on making progress, moral progress, spiritual progress, if you don't keep going, it won't be long before you stop movement and you're standing still. And it won't be long after that before you're no longer interested in making forward progress and you sit down and you're content where you are. [00:22:10] In a special way, those who have no thought of God give evidence of this. Verse 1 is a summary of the ungodly. Blessed, talking about the man or the woman who's determined to live for God in a wicked world, the psalmist starts off by saying there's blessing in swimming against the tide. Don't be too worried if you find yourself being different to the people that you live beside or go to school with or work beside. There's something very much wrong if you find that you're a blessing for the godly, not walking in the counsel of the ungodly, not standing in the way of sinners, not sitting in the seat of the scornful.

[00:23:16] The counsel of the ungodly. When we counsel, we think over our plans and we decide how

we are going to do things.

The ungodly leave God out of their plans altogether. Now, may well be that due to embarrassment, due to convenience, due to the fact that it may be easier, it is ever so easy that the first movement towards the slippery slope of spiritual decline is just to walk along, to keep the company, to do things in the company of those who aren't believers.

[00:24:21] Oh, I wouldn't dream of doing the same as they do, but I might walk along with them, not really part of it, thinking myself quite different, but yet just going along with the tide. Now, the ungodly not only take counsel and make plans without God, but what they do in their occupations when they are standing about is the way of sinners. Now, when terms are put as simply and as starkly as this, perhaps it might make us think about the company that we keep. [00:25:03] Well-known phrase, we get like the company we keep. That's why it's imperative for believers to keep good company, the company of other believers with whom you are like-minded. If not, if you walk along with the tide of the ungodly who counsel together without any thought of God in their hearts, wouldn't be long before we found ourselves standing in the way of sinners, those who are content with their lot, leaving God out of their plans and ultimately sitting down in the seat of the scornful in their ease, enjoying the life that they've got, not only leaving God out of their plans, but scorning those who do. Now, it's put in a very negative way, so it seems. Outwardly speaking, 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. [00:26:18] An old Bible word that fits verse 1 is to say that any who is determined to live a life which is according to God will live a life which is separate from the unbelieving world.

The first movement in living a life which is according to God is living a separate existence as far as possible, certainly morally, from the life of the world that hates God. Now, if we turn, and I think it'll do us well to look at the verse, Romans chapter 12 and verse 2, the first phrase in Romans 12 verse 2, [00:27:19] be not conformed to this world. Don't allow your life to take its outward shape or form from the character of the world which cast Christ out.

Wouldn't have him as saviour and crucified him at Calvary. Some of us on Lord's Day afternoon were looking at other scriptures which spoke of the same kind of thing. Leviticus 11 speaks of that which is cleaned according to God being that which gives evidence of the cloven hoof, an animal or a kind of animal which every step that it takes shows a clear line of demarcation in the imprint of its foot or its hoof upon the earth. [00:28:18] Now, this has its moral reflection and here it is in Psalm 1 that outwardly not going along with the tide, Romans 12 verse 2, first phrase, not being conformed to this world. Now, we don't want to dwell too long on the negative side, but it's often very necessary. If you look again at 2 Timothy chapters 1, 2 and 3, we'll just make a brief reference to them and move quickly on. The danger of going along with that which is evil. 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 15, this thou knowest that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me of whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

[00:29:19] If you look in chapter 2, verse 17, their word will eat as doth a canker of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus who concerning the truth of word saying that the resurrection is past already and overthrow the faith of some. Chapter 3, verse 8, as Janes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth. Now, this is very much underlining the warning in Psalm 1, verse 1.

[00:30:02] If you put the statements that are said about the pairs of individuals in 2 Timothy 1, 2, 3, if

you look up your Bible dictionary in concordance and see the meanings of the words that are used in the build-up of their names, you'll find that this is the message from 2 Timothy 1, 2, 3, message for Christians just before the coming of the Lord. Those who turn away from the truth before very long accept something which is not the truth and are ultimately found resisting the truth. In other words, by going along with the tide and saying, well, they're very nice people, does it really matter what they believe, when something vital is at stake, unless we go along positively with the truth, [00:31:05] we'll find ourselves slipping away from it, accepting something which is not true and ultimately lining ourselves with those who are opposed to the truth. Follow that up in 2 Timothy 1, 2 and 3 and see how it matches with walking, standing and sitting in Psalm 1, verse 1.

Let us move to the positive side in verse 2.

But, oh, one of the grand buts of Scripture, but, his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

[00:32:03] Evidently chewing the cud, delighting in the law of the Lord day and night. There is no substitute, is there, for regular, steady, imbibing, chewing over, meditating the truth of God as revealed in the Word of God, in the power of the Spirit of God, as that inner power to produce that which is according to God. Well, let's turn again to Romans 12. Again, verse 2, but this time the latter part of the verse.

The first part, be not conformed to this world, your life should be different to the worldly people round about you, but be ye transformed by that inner power of the life which God has implanted by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove in a positive way what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. [00:33:19] A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things. Anything that's according to God must come from the inside, and because God has planted it there, and it will only come out in a godly walk if there is at the same time dissociation from evil and going along with that which is good. Well, we have to leave verses 1 and 2 there. Now, if verse 1 tells us about obvious external conduct which is easily seen in separation from that which is evil, [00:34:09] if verse 2 tells us about that inner life which comes out positively in a life that is well pleasing to God as a result of devotion to God, we can see in verse 3 the result of dependence upon God. I'd like just to make a mental note, in verse 1, separation, verse 2, devotion, verse 3, dependence and the fruit of it. Now, your mind, of course, when we read verse 3, will go to Isaiah 5, speaking of the nation of Israel, how everything was done by divine arrangement, that God chose the choicest location and the choicest vine, and he planted it by his own divine arrangement, and by the way that he expected fruit he caused a vineyard and a wine press to be constructed with the expectation of fruit. [00:35:17] We can think also of the last chapter in the Bible, which looks on to a time upon earth when there will be an adequate response to God for all the work that he has done in the souls of men in order that there might be that with which he is well pleased. And there we get the tree of life with 12 manners of fruit for every season.

Now, with that kind of general scripture in mind, when we turn to verse 3, we find this, he, the godly person, man or woman, who has said plainly that he or she wants nothing to do with the ungodly world which crucified Christ, [00:36:12] the godly person that draws his strength and every supply from God in meditating and in communion with his Lord day and night, we'll find that this is the one who is likened to a tree planted by the rivers of water. Like Isaiah 5 about the nation of Israel, here about the godly person in an ungodly world, we find that it doesn't just happen. A tree planted, there's intent, there's purpose, there's arrangement. It is done with specific intent. It is planted by the rivers of water.

[00:37:01] If you compare the various translations available, you will get words like rivers of water, brooks of water, streams of water, in every case running water, living water. If you compare the various scriptures that speak about water, where they are used symbolically, you'll find that where water, if you like static water, as a resource is referred to, it's usually speaking about the word of God. If the water that is referred to is living, running, bubbling, springing up, flowing, it's usually an indication of the work of the Spirit of God. Now, in line with that, there's no doubt that meditating upon the law of God as revealed in the scriptures can only be made good in our souls when it is in the power of the Spirit of God. [00:38:11] The tree planted by the rivers or brooks of water, there is an ample supply of all that we need to live according to God in a contrary world in the canon of scripture. Do we believe that? It's useful, it's helpful, it's interesting to read other books, other things. But fundamentally, the plumb line, the lifeline of the godly person is that which is found in the word of God. Well, this is the way for fruitfulness. Dependence upon God as the sole supplier of all that's good for life results in this, bringing forth his fruit in his season.

[00:39:08] Fruit, again, as a general term, tells us what God is going to get out of it. Tells us that there's something for God in the weakest, most isolated, most insignificant as far as the world is concerned, the most insignificant believer in the world who sets themselves to live according to God. Now that's an encouragement, isn't it? Fruit for God in his season.

In several of the parables, we find that there's this element comes in, the need for patience. Things that are worthwhile take time to develop. [00:40:01] We know that in our lives. We know that in our families. We know that in our studies. We know that in our jobs. Things that are worthwhile take time to build up, to learn, to express, to bear fruit. And so it is, there is a season for sowing, there is a season for planting, there is a season for watering, a season for reaping, a season when there is fruit to be expected. One of the difficult things in seeking to be faithful to God is to do the right thing for the right reason, with the right motive in the heart, and to be able to refrain from being impatient.

[00:41:01] If we do the right thing in the right way for the right reason, we want immediate results. Well, God may grant us that. But usually, there is the addition of a waiting time, waiting God's season, not mine, before something is seen to bear fruit. Very often, we are told we have need of patience. Well, there is perhaps the suggestion here, the fruit in the season tells us that there is a need for what God is working to mature and come to fruition, rather than our setting our own timetable to it. Well, there is fruit in the season, the leaf does not wither. Remember, the Lord Jesus had to curse a fig tree, and the leaf was there, there was no fruit, it was withered, fit for nothing else but the burning, [00:42:03] and the Lord Jesus had to give his comment on it, as he did for the nation of Israel in its then present condition, no fruit for God. Happy little word at the end of verse 3, whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. Read the blessing to the Nazarite in Numbers chapter 6. Read the happy little thing that is said about Gaius, mine host, in 3 John verse 2. It's a happy little prayer that John prays. He says, I pray that you might prosper and be in health even as your soul prospers. Very good. If the outstanding thing about someone that we know well is that they are enjoying prosperity of soul, and our prayer to God is that this might find a reflection in personal health too. Well, whatsoever he doeth shall prosper, the way to true prosperity. [00:43:12] There isn't much time, and there isn't much need, perhaps, to dwell on the detail of verses 4 to 6. If we want the subheading for this, I suppose we could call it the character and doom of the ungodly. God gives his assessment of the godly, the kind of person that he is looking for in an ungodly world. Read Jude's epistle, and you'll get the sense of what it means to live in an ungodly world. And the world that's described in the epistle of Jude is a description of the world that we live in towards the end of God's ways upon earth. [00:44:01] Well, verses 4, 5, and 6 then give a description of the end and the doom of the ungodly. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff

which the wind driveth away.

A paradox, something very difficult to understand, is that at present the righteous always seem to suffer, the unrighteous always seem to prosper.

Thank God it shall not always be so. We live in an upside-down world at the moment, but that grand verse, Acts 17, 31, tells us that God has appointed a day in which he will rule the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained, whereof he has given assurance unto all, in that God has raised him from the dead. [00:45:09] God's world, with God's man, the man Christ Jesus, in ultimate charge, will be a righteous world where the righteous are honoured and the unrighteous will be judged. At the moment it's the other way around, because God's man, Christ, has been set aside and the ungodly are given the prime place. We shouldn't be surprised. David shouldn't have been surprised in his day. We cannot be surprised now. If those who seek to be true to Christ in an ungodly world seem to get the same kind of treatment that the Lord Jesus did in the days of his flesh. This is why it's a picture of the godly in an ungodly world and therefore best and most fully demonstrated in the life of Christ here upon earth. [00:46:12] But the ungodly are like wheat and chaff. Remember what was said at the beginning of the Gospels? When the master comes, he will gather the wheat into his garner and the chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire.

Judgment. Judgment will be the ultimate portion of the ungodly, so why line yourself up with them at the present time? When the judgment does come, the final judgment, the ungodly will not be able to stand. You see, it goes back to verse 1. Standing in the way of sinners. Why stand? Why align yourself with the sinners in a sinful world? Because the sinners won't stand in the day of judgment. [00:47:07] On the contrary, we who trust in Jesus as saviour, we have boldness in respect of the day of judgment. For as he is, so are we in this world completely clear of every call upon judgment. And then, just a little verse, verse 6, The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. Yes, the ungodly will perish. The godly will be honoured. And in view of that, the godly man or woman is prepared, quite content, to leave things to God.

After all, that's what happened to the Lord Jesus. There is a verse in Thessalonians which exhorts us to cultivate the same attitude as the Lord Jesus Christ. [00:48:06] He's due to be honoured. He will be honoured. But he's content to wait until the Father says, this is the moment, this is the day. And we are exhorted to wait with the patient waiting of the Christ.

In the addresses to the seven churches, a moment comes when much that bears the name of Christ is going along hand in glove with the world, the address to the church at Pergamos, but those who are looked at as overcomers, those who are determined, even in a minority, to be true to God, they are given a special blessing while they wait for everything to be put right. They are given the sense of the secret approval of the one to whom they are seeking to be true, [00:49:07] put, in a very picturesque way, in the sign of approval, a white stone. Now, it seems to me that the last touch in this psalm says this to us, if you are set here for God, if you are determined to live for God, because in his wonderful mercy he has saved you, if you've been encouraged and allowed and empowered to put your faith in Christ as Saviour, he's coming for you soon, and while you wait for him, you can be content. In the minority, knowing that the time when things will be put right according to God will be at the moment that he has decreed, and the sense of his secret, private, personal approval [00:50:02] to those who are godly in an ungodly world is the promise that is held out. Now, let us, as we look at other psalms from time to time, remember this basic lesson, which is true of the first book of psalms and the whole book of psalms, that while it may not seem so at the present time, it is a worthwhile

thing to live here according to God until the time when he puts his man, the Lord Jesus Christ, in ultimate charge, when everything shall be seen in proper perspective.