

Psalm 1: The Churchgoers Psalm

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, and the book of Psalms and Psalm 1.

The book of Psalms and Psalm 1. We're going to look at the whole Psalm, but just if we take as our text the words of verses 1 and 2. Psalm 1 and verse 1.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

In the day and age that we live in, it's safe to say that church attendance seems to be at an all-time low.

Coming to church and attending church services seems to be a thing of the past. And with every passing year, the church census, it always tells us that the church is in decline, and those who are attending church are becoming fewer and fewer.

[1 : 2 1] And even in our own island, even this evening, we can see that the church, which used to be a strong and vibrant part of community life, it's now in the minority.

And many of our church buildings, they're just standing there as a memorial of what used to take place in the past. But you know what's remarkable is that regardless of all the changes that have taken place in our society over the past 50 years, with, you could say, the promotion of liberalism, having open-minded views about sexuality or gender or tolerance, even with all these opinions and views being promoted in our 21st century society, even with all of these things, there still remains only two types of people in the world.

We may look at our modern world and think that there are many different people with many different labels. And we may place them in all sorts of different categories. We might place them according to their gender or their nationality or their age or their wealth or their sexuality or their location or their education.

We might put people into all sorts of categories. But the reality is that when the Lord looks at us, there are only two types of people in this world. And that's because our Bible tells us that man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

And you know, that's what Psalm 1 presents to us. It presents to us the two different types of people living in this world. And these two different types of people, say Psalm 1, they are going in two different directions and they will have two different outcomes.

[3 : 0 4] But more than that, these two different types of people are to be found in church. Because if there are only two different types of people in the world, then there are only two different types of people sitting in church.

And I say all this because Psalm 1 is the churchgoers Psalm. Psalm 1 is the churchgoers Psalm. And Psalm 1, it presents to us the two types of people who come to church.

And this is because Psalm 1, it is the introductory Psalm to the book of Psalms. It's not the first Psalm, as we said. The first Psalm that was written was Psalm 90, which was written by Moses.

But Psalm 1, it is intentionally placed here on the threshold of the book of Psalms in order to remind us that there are only two types of people who will sing from this book.

There are only two types of churchgoers who will use this prescribed book of praise. And Psalm 1 tells us that they are either blessed or they are cursed.

[4 : 10] They are blessed or they are cursed. And you know, it's such a solemn Psalm because at the outset of this book of praise, you are being asked here in Psalm 1, what kind of churchgoer are you?

What kind of worshipper are you? We're all in church here this evening. And this is the churchgoers Psalm. And we're all being described in this Psalm.

But the Psalm is asking us, which one are you? Which one are you? Are you blessed? Or are you cursed? And the reason one is blessed and the other is cursed is because one is in Christ.

The other is still in Adam. One is saved. The other is still in sin. One is redeemed. The other is still in ruin. One is holy. Made holy through Jesus.

The other is hell bound. My friends, Psalm 1 is the churchgoer's Psalm. And in it, we're being confronted with two different people on two different paths going towards two different positions.

[5 : 17] And I'd like us to consider this churchgoer's Psalm this evening just under three headings. We see the contrast, the comparison, and then the conclusion.

The contrast, the comparison, and the conclusion. So if we look first of all at the contrast. The contrast in verses one and two.

He says, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

And so the churchgoer's Psalm, it opens by setting before us this contrast. And it's a contrast between these two types of people in the world and these two types of people who come to church.

One is blessed, the other is cursed. And the first churchgoer that the psalmist draws our attention to is the blessed churchgoer. That's how the psalm begins. He says, Blessed is the man.

[6 : 21] Now I just want to linger there for a moment because that statement alone is so beautiful. The psalmist is describing a churchgoer as blessed.

He says, Blessed is the man. And this is beautiful because blessedness is a gift. To be blessed is to receive something that you don't deserve.

To be blessed is to be shown undeserved favor. To be blessed is to be graciously given a gift. Freely given to you. That's what it means to be blessed.

You often hear people saying that they're blessed because they have many good things in life which make them happy and satisfied. But that's not what it means to be blessed. That's not what true blessedness is.

Because the word bless or blessed, it literally means to kneel. In the sense of kneeling down before a king. And you're kneeling before him in submission.

[7 : 24] And the image which the word bless seeks to portray to us is this, the image of a throne and a king. He's standing up from his throne. And you as the king's subject, you're kneeling down before the king.

You're submitting under the king's authority and his sovereignty. And you know, you're receiving from the gracious hand of the king something you haven't earned.

Something that you haven't worked for. Something that you don't deserve. And yet the king is graciously giving to you this wonderful gift. And the psalmist is saying, that's what blessedness is.

That's what the blessed churchgoer looks like. He or she is the person who has humbly submitted their heart, their life, their authority, their will to the king.

And of course the king is King Jesus. And the undeserved gift that has been graciously given is salvation. And you know, that's what makes the difference.

[8 : 26] This is what creates the contrast between the blessed man and the cursed man. Because my friend, the gracious provision of salvation from King Jesus. That's what makes all the difference.

And what's remarkable about this is that the outworking of this blessedness is that the blessed churchgoer lives their life completely different to the cursed churchgoer.

That's what the psalmist says. He says that the blessed churchgoer lives their life in complete contrast to the cursed churchgoer. The blessed churchgoer lives their life distinct and separate from the way of the cursed churchgoer.

He says in verse 1, blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

The psalmist says that the blessed churchgoer who has come to know salvation in Jesus Christ by faith, he says they no longer walk in the counsel of the wicked.

[9 : 33] They don't live the way they used to live, he's saying. They don't live the way they used to live without grace. They don't take their advice and their guidance and their direction from the trends and fashions and fads of this world.

No, he says in verse 2, their delight is in the law of the Lord. And they meditate on that law day and night. But more than that, he says the blessed churchgoer doesn't stand in the way of sinners.

They don't stand in the path of sinners. That path that leads away from God, away from Christ, away from His Word, away from His truth, away from His righteousness.

The blessed churchgoer, they have separated themselves from a path of temporary happiness and enjoyment and entertainment that leads to destruction. Why have they done it?

Verse 2 again. Their delight is in the law of the Lord. They meditate on that law day and night. But there's still more, he says, because we're told that the blessed churchgoer doesn't sit in the seat of scoffers.

[10 : 40] They have humbled their heart. They've submitted their life. They've bowed the knee under the authority of King Jesus. They're not proud of who they are and what they are and what they've achieved for themselves.

They don't sit self-satisfied with all that they have and see no need of King Jesus for their salvation. No, their heart has changed. The blessed churchgoer, their heart has changed.

Their life has been transformed. Their sin has been forgiven. They're blessed. And because of this blessedness, verse 2 again, their delight is in the law of the Lord and they meditate on that law day and night.

And you know, this is the greatest contrast between the blessed churchgoer and the cursed churchgoer. The blessed churchgoer delights in God's word.

They drink it in. They love the Bible. They enjoy being in church. They want to be with the Lord's people. They want to sing the Psalms of praise to God.

[11 : 49] But the cursed churchgoer, the cursed churchgoer is only here out of duty. They're only here out of a sense of routine. They're only here to please someone or to ease their own conscience.

There's no delight in the Lord coming from the heart of the cursed churchgoer. There's only deadness in their heart. In fact, the heart of the cursed churchgoer, it isn't softening the more they come to church.

Their heart is hardening. And I say that because when you look at this psalm and when it comes to the cursed churchgoer, they only seem to be progressing in sin.

Because we read here that the churchgoer, the cursed churchgoer, first of all, walks in the counsel of the wicked. Then they stand in the way of sinners.

Then they sit in the seat of scoffers. The cursed churchgoer has this progression in sin. They walk, they stand, they sit.

[12 : 56] There's a progression away from Jesus. There's a progression away from Jesus. They walk, they stand, they sit.

But the psalmist says that for the blessed churchgoer, they do not do that. Their delight is in the law of the Lord. They meditate on that law day and night.

The blessed churchgoer, their hope, their forgiveness, their salvation, their peace, their joy, their life, it all comes from the word of God. And they shape their life according to that word and not the counsel of the ungodly.

They walk in the path of righteousness and not in the way of sinners. They sit at the table of the Lord, not in the seat of scoffers. They delight in the Lord and his word and they humbly learn to imitate their gracious king.

And that's because the blessed churchgoer can see that everything they have received, it has been given to them by the outstretched hand of King Jesus. And you know, all the time this churchgoer, Sam, is asking us, what kind of churchgoer are you?

[14 : 06] What kind of worshipper are you? Which one are you in this psalm, he's saying? Are you the blessed churchgoer or the cursed churchgoer? Are you in church as someone, in church tonight as someone who has humbly received this gracious gift of salvation from King Jesus?

Or are you still saying as you've been saying for many a year, I will not have this man to rule over me? Which one are you?

We see the contrast. But then secondly, the comparison. The comparison. Look at verse 3. He says, He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does he prospers. The wicked are not so but are like chaff that the wind drives away. And so having contrasted these two different churchgoers who are going in two different directions and will have two different outcomes, having done that in verses 1 and 2, the psalmist now describes them further by making two comparisons.

Because he says that the blessed churchgoer is like a tree planted by a river. But the cursed churchgoer is like chaff that's blown away.

[15 : 39] And so for the blessed churchgoer, the psalmist says that the blessed churchgoer is like this strong tree with solid roots that are grounded firm and deep in Jesus Christ.

They're strong and firm in Christ. And because they're in Christ they draw all their nourishment and all their strength and all their vitality from the river of life which is Jesus Christ.

He is the river of life. As I know what Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, whosoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. Because the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

And so for the blessed churchgoer they will be like a tree planted beside a river stable strong and secure. And it's all in Christ.

And because they're in Christ we're told that they yield its fruit in its season. They will be fruit. There will be evidence in the life of the churchgoer that they have been blessed by King Jesus.

[16 : 51] But you know what's remarkable is that that blessedness enables the churchgoer the blessed churchgoer to be fruitful in every season of their life.

Because like a tree planted by a river the blessed churchgoer must endure must endure all seasons. Not every season in the life of a believer is like spring where there's renewed life and there's renewed strength and vitality.

Because in the life of a believer there will also be the hot summer of temptation and trial. Then there will be the changing season of autumn where there will be changes that bring different colours some brighter some darker some with joy some with sorrow some with addition some with loss.

You know autumn it always brings change and it brings change in the life of the believer where there will be change in circumstances change in life change in family change in health and these changes they're often followed by the cold long cold dark nights of winter where there's loneliness sometimes isolation sometimes little growth and little nourishment but you know what's remarkable about the description of the blessed churchgoer is that regardless of the season the roots are still deep in the river.

The roots are still drawing from the river all year round whether it's spring summer autumn or winter Jesus is still supplying all the necessary nourishment.

[18 : 31] and is it not true my friend that with every passing year as a Christian your roots become stronger and they go deeper into the river you become more grounded more secure more firm more fruitful because were it not for the river you would die you would wither there would be no life were it not for Jesus to draw upon there would be no life were it not for Jesus the blessed churchgoer couldn't be fruitful throughout every season of life and you know I love that beautiful reminder of in Psalm 92 which we were singing earlier as we said it's a psalm that was always sung on the Sabbath day because in it we have the reminder of the Christian who's grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love and even though they have to go through many seasons of life they still draw nourishment from the river of life

Jesus Christ and in Psalm 92 the psalmist describes the Christian as we sang a flourishing palm tree and like the tall cedar trees of Lebanon they were strong trees and he says those that within the house of God are planted by his grace they shall grow up and flourish all in our God's holy place but the psalmist he didn't leave it there because he then speaks about the old Christian who's been drawing from the Lord for many years who's been walking with the Lord for many years and he says and in old age when others fade they fruit still forth shall bring they shall be fat and full of sap and they be flourishing and you know my friend despite all the seasons of life all that you've had to go through you can still say that you have had this faithful constant that will never change you have had this constant supply of life giving water flowing to you from your king and fountain head

Jesus Christ and you can say tonight that because of him you have life because of him you have peace with God because of him you have assurance of salvation because of him you have stability and security it's because of him you have the hope of glory because of him you have the unshakable promises of his word because of him you have the presence of God's spirit dwelling within you because of him you have the promise that he will never leave you and he will never forsake you because of him you are blessed and you're blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ you're blessed but notice what the psalmist says about the cursed church goer look what he says in verse 4 he says the wicked are not so but are like chaff that the wind drives away the wicked are not so the wicked man the cursed man he's the unconverted church goer he's still in Adam still in his sin still in ruin still without cry still without hope still walking in the counsel of the wicked still standing in the way of sinners still sitting in the seat of scoffers and by all intents and purposes this unconverted church goer when we see them they're nice people they're moral people they're warm and friendly people they look the part they act the part they participate in the service they sing the psalms they read the scriptures they listen to the sermon but as we said we might be we might put people into all these sorts of categories but the reality is that when the Lord looks at us there are only two types of people in church the Lord looks not in the outward appearance but on the heart and what this church goer psalm is presenting to us is not what we see but what

God sees and this church goer psalm it gives to us an accurate description of the cursed church goer because when we ask are they blessed when we ask about the cursed church goer are they blessed the Bible says not so are they saved not so are they forgiven not so are they washed not so are they righteous not so are they fruitful not so are they flourishing not so are they secure not so are they grounded and rooted in Christ not so do they have peace in life not so do they have hope and death not so not so not so he says the wicked are not so and if they're not like the tree planted by the streams of water then what are they like and the psalmist says they are like the chaff that the wind drives away they have no stability they have no security they have no safety and you know this comparison of the cursed churchgoer it's a solemn illustration because the useless chaff that was separated from the wheat it's often mentioned in the bible in relation to God's final judgment and you know that was the case with

John the Baptist John the Baptist he preached to all the churchgoers of his day and he preached about the arrival of King Jesus and John proclaimed to them he said that King Jesus will come and he will come with a winnowing fork in his hand and he will clear the threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn but he will burn the chaff in unquenchable fire my friend this churchgoer psalm is solemnly reminding us that the churchgoer who is still unconverted still in Adam still in their sins still in ruin still without Christ still without hope still walking in the council of the wicked still standing in the way of sinners still sitting in the seat of scoffers that churchgoer he says will be like the chaff that the wind drives away into the unquenchable fire of hell and you know all the time the churchgoer psalm is asking us what kind of churchgoer are you what kind of worshipper are you are you blessed by receiving this free gift of salvation or are you cursed by rejecting this free gift of salvation are you wheat being gathered into the barn or are you chaff that's been burned are you in

[25 : 54] Christ or are you still in Adam the way you were born are you saved or are you in sin are you redeemed or are you in ruin are you holy or are you hell bound what kind of churchgoer are you what kind of churchgoer are you let us hear the conclusion of the matter the contrast comparison and lastly and briefly the conclusion the conclusion look at verse 5 therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous for the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish this churchgoer psalm it concludes with the outcome of these two different types of churchgoer when they appear at the judgment seat of

Christ the psalmist says in verse 5 the wicked will not stand in the judgment now that doesn't mean that they won't appear at the judgment seat of Christ they will appear the Bible is very clear that they will appear before Christ at the last judgment your Bible will tell you that it's appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment your Bible will tell you that all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account but when the cursed churchgoer the unconverted churchgoer when they appear at the judgment seat of Christ they will not stand as righteous in God's sight they will be pronounced guilty of sin and condemned to hell for all eternity now this is the point they are condemned to hell not because God didn't save them but because they refused to accept the gracious gift of salvation from the hand of the king and you know what's so awful about this conclusion to the churchgoer psalm is that it not only emphasizes that the cursed churchgoer will not be able to stand in the judgment it's also that they will be separated from God's people we're told that they will not stand in the congregation of the righteous churchgoers will be separated they may have come from the same family they may have walked through the same church door they may have sat in the same church pew they may have read from the same Bible they may have sung the same psalm they may have heard the same sermon but the churchgoers at the last day will be separated and you know looking out at all of you this evening

I tried to think what that separation will be like I tried to think what it would be like on the day of judgment for all of us as churchgoers and you know my unconverted churchgoer you can't say to me on the day of judgment I never told you you can't say to me that I never warned you and that I never pleaded with you because you know that my longing for you is that you'll be saved that you'll be in Christ that you'll be blessed but you know the thing is you will never be saved if you don't do anything about it you'll never be saved if you don't ask Jesus to save you you'll never be saved if you don't commit your life to

Jesus Christ and you know that's how the churchgoer psalm concludes it says the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish eternal death in eternal damnation my friend there are only two types of people in this world there are only two types of people who come to church there are only two types of churchgoer and you are one of them you are one of them and this churchgoer psalm is asking you what kind of churchgoer are you what kind of worshipper are you are you blessed or are you cursed are you in Christ or are you in Adam are you saved or are you lost are you redeemed or are you in ruin are you heaven bound or are you hell bound and you know the thing is we don't need to wait until the day of judgment to know what our judgment will be we all know if we're in

Christ or out of Christ we all know if we've committed our life to Jesus or not we all know where we stand with the Lord tonight so what kind of churchgoer are you that's a question I want to leave you with what kind of churchgoer are you what kind of churchgoer are you may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh Lord our gracious God we give thanks to thee for the privilege of hearing the gospel we thank thee Lord for thy word that confronts us where we are thy word that always presents to us the truth it never hides from us what we are and what we need but it reminds us that we need Jesus and that we are sinners who need to be saved and Lord we plead with thee that thou wouldst speak to us that thou wouldst close in with us that thou

[33 : 01] Lord wouldst enable us to be blessed by receiving this precious gift that thy word reminds us that the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord bless thy truth to us we plead awaken our heart and our mind we ask go before us into the week that lies ahead a week that is unknown to us but known only to thee keep us on mercy's ground then until we find thee and go before us for Jesus sake amen we're going to conclude our service this evening by singing from that psalm psalm one psalm one we'll sing the whole psalm it's on page 200 that man of perfect blessedness who walketh not astray in counsel of ungodly men nor stands in sinner's way nor sitteth in the scorner's chair but placeth his delight upon

God's law and meditates on his law day and night the whole psalm to God's praise God that man of perfect blessedness who walketh not astray in counsel of ungodly men nor stands in sinners way nor did heaven in their corners near but with his delight upon God's law and meditate on his day and night he shall be like a tree that grows near planted by a river which in his season yields his fruit and his feet they get never and only death shall prosper well the wicked are not so but like they are unto the chap which wind drives to and throw in judgment therefore shall not stand such as as a godly hour nor in the assembly of the just shall wicked men appear for why the way of godly men unto the lord his stone whereas the way of wicked men shall quite be overthrown the grace of the lord jesus christ the love of god the father and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with you all now and forever more amen