

The Two Paths

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'll turn to Sam one then in the scriptures.

I don't know if many of you would recognise the name Roger Hargreaves, but Roger Hargreaves, I was a big fan of his as a child because he's the author of the Mr Men Books, Mr Happy, etc. Mr Greedy, Mr Tickle was my favourite. He had very long arms and could reach in the window. Tickle you, but one of the distinctive aspects of the world in which these characters lived was that every signpost simply had two signs and one of them said this way and the other one said that way. This way and that way was what all the signposts said in the world of the Mr Men. And it reminded me of the very clear signposts that are there at the very opening of the Psalter in Sam one, which is not there by accident, is there really as the front door into the whole book of Psalms along with Psalm 2 which complements it in so many ways is that it is showing us a signpost. This way and that way the way of the righteous, the way of the blessed man is going along one path with one destination and then the way of the wicked person, the way of the sinner and that is ending in a completely different destination. You see that even in the words at the very beginning and the end of the Psalm begins with the word blessed or blessed and it ends with the word perish, the blessing and the curse if you like depending on how you stand before God either blessed or cursed.

We live in a world where we're told there are many different paths to walk in really whichever one you want is the path that you should walk in. Wherever your heart would lead you is the path that you should walk in and we're even told in some religious circles there are many paths, many paths to fulfilment, many paths to blessing, many paths to salvation and even many paths to God. But that's in stark contrast to Holy Scripture which tells us that there are only two people in the entire world, the righteous and the wicked, the blessed and the perishing. There are only two people, types of people walking along two different paths which end in two completely different destinations and this Psalm puts it out so clearly by giving us a picture of the blessed person, an ideal picture if you like a picture that we would have on our wall if we were a kid with all our favourite stars, sports stars or something up on our wall. This is who we want to be like contrasted with the disastrous picture of ruin that results if we're on the sinner's path and then we're confronted with a choice almost at the very outset of the Psalter the first Psalm gives us a choice saying which path will it be? Who do you identify with? Who are you in this

Psalm? Because before you go any further into the Psalter that treasure house of praise which shows us the full gamut of human experience and emotion we will only really be able to make sense of it if we're on this blessed path. It will make no sense to us if we're not. If you like actually someone is like a legend above the door into this treasure house of praise that is the Psalter saying who are you? It's a convicting Psalm and it's a convicting Psalm as well for a reason because we are driven when we consider these two pictures to consider that by nature we are all the chaff like person that's described here and therefore we need a righteousness that is not our own. We need one who has fulfilled this picture of the blessed man to be a righteousness for us to be our saviour that we might have a right standing before God and in that confidence the confidence in him set off on this pilgrimage throughout the remaining 149 beautiful prayer songs that we have here in this precious book of the Bible. So we will look then first of all at this picture of the blessed person.

What are they like? Again I was saying it's so short in the Psalm only six verses but it contains so much within it that there's so much to dwell upon and so much to chew over as we think about it that it could leave us meditating upon it for an eternity. So what is this blessed person like? Well interestingly verse one of Psalm one describes what the blessed person is like negatively that is in what they do not do in what they are not like first of all. Not in what they are doing or what they are like in the first instance is by what they avoid is how they are described. Look at me with look with me at verse one then blessed is the man who walks not in the council of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of scoffers. Three negatives, three things he does not do, does not associate himself with and this threefold repetition really stresses it doesn't it? It brings across how emphatically he shuns these things, how resolutely his mind is made up not to have anything to do with these activities that are described here but more than that we also see how sin in this description how sin insinuates itself into the life of someone because it starts off with a description of not walking in the council of the wicked not walking which means not to be associated with the advice of particularly when associated with this word council. So not walking in these ways not taking bad council wicked council but then it develops into standing in the way of sinners and to stand with someone is more than to walk with them in this language and in the way that it's being expressed it's to be more associated with them if you like to be taking one stand alongside to be counted among sinners and then we end up in this threefold repetition of something worse sitting in the seat of scoffers to sit with others would be to be completely associated with them particularly in the Israelite culture where table fellowship was so important who one sat with and therefore often ate with one would be completely associated with and we see then how it is that people so easily fall into a state of sin they never thought they would end up in in the first place when they were just walking in the council of the wicked it's just some advice I'm just talking with my friends I'm just taking it on board but before you know it there's a downward spiral and you're standing in the way of sinners that is more involved in their lifestyle taking on board what they've said and now putting it into practice in your life until it gets to the point where you're sitting among the ones who are the scoffers and scoffers believe it or not is really a worse term if there is such a thing then sinner because the scoffer particularly in the book of Proverbs is described as the one who scoffs in particular at the things of God not just a sarcastic

[9 : 46] person or someone who doesn't take things seriously but scoff specifically at the godly and scoffs at the things of God and the worship of God and the word of God and is therefore described as this abomination the worst kind of person and so to be seated with them it's often the way with sin it's often the way with Satan is that he insinuates his way in someone doesn't end up very often immediately in the most abject sin it comes in bit by bit it has worked its way in in this downward spiral pattern of first of all walking according to bad counsel what you allow into your mind then standing in a particularly sinful way what you are doing in your life until you're utterly immersed in wickedness and counted as it were among the scoffers those who despise God the things of God the word of God now take it from one who knows as you'll be hearing hopefully after the service this was my experience before

I became a Christian because I ended up becoming a hopeless drug addict and believe me I never set out initially to end up in the kind of horrific condition I ended up in but it started in this way just associating with the wrong company and the wrong advice and being easily led and susceptible to what they were saying to then becoming more involved but not thinking it's leading anywhere beyond that but before you know it you're down in the lowest place seated with the scoffers it's a great warning to be so watchful to be so careful in the way this blessed man is to go so carefully to be discerning in what advice you take in who you listen to and in our media culture that requires a lot of discernment and cutting a lot of things out that are just going to be too dangerous to be taking into our minds which are very susceptible and then also not living out this wicked counsel in a sinful lifestyle that could end us up in a place we never intended to go in the first place but then when we find ourselves there waking up as it were coming to ourselves and finding how far it's gone having very little in the way of knowing what to do to get back out of that.

Another begins with this with this advice it's very telling that it begins in this way as to be what how to be so careful because if we are as we saw the very first word is blessed happy in enjoyment of life not necessarily because of one's external circumstances but blessed because they know the blesser blessed because they know the ever blessed God to be righteous in that sense is really to be right with him and therefore to be on his side to have bowed the knee before him and to have confessed that all good things come from him and therefore to be walking before him.

Blessed happy it's the way to be happy if you like that's being laid out before us here that's what he's not like very careful but what is he like what then does define him if these things are things he has nothing to do with verse 2 verse 2 his defining characteristic is that his delight is in the law of the Lord that's how you could sum it up sum up what he's like ah well the blessed man you want to know about him well his delights in the law of the Lord that's how you would describe him his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law he meditates day and night it's not in doing these things in verse 1 instead is that he loves the law something which means something broader than simply the 10 commandments or law in the legal sense but the whole of God's teaching his Torah his instruction he finds that to be his delight he's always turning to it see it sees that as his source of instruction and therefore we see in the second part of verse 2 he meditates on it day and night this isn't just some kind of slavish obedience because you see the emphasis on delight this is something he gets enjoyment from and realises it's a wonderful source of nourishment to him it's food for his soul and therefore he meditates on it day and night and this word meditate even describes or has the sense of murmuring or muttering the word that is reading it aloud in a low voice in order to really let it sink in and to ruminate over it almost like a cow is well chewing the cud and getting every last bit of goodness out of it that's meditating on the word and how often do we fail to do that when we are in our perhaps our daily devotions in our Bible readings and we read something and walk away and it's as if we'd never read it or in worship and we've heard a sermon and someone asks us later well what was it all about and we can struggle to remember this instead is saying meditate on it don't just be there for the preaching of it and then walk away as if it no longer should have any effect but lay it up in your heart and chew it over in your mind and reflect upon it this is biblical meditation and it's something that's quite absent from a lot of the spirituality particularly I would say in the mainland that no people tend in their the busyness and their distracted lives not to take the time not just to read and to pray but to think about the word because it's in thinking on it and even repeating it as reading it aloud that we really can take it more to heart and it's to our good because we see the result of that delight of having that delight right at the core of our spiritual lives is verse 3 he's like a tree planted by us by streams of water that yields its fruit in season and its leaf does not wither the Psalms of course are full of word pictures aren't they they're famous for their word pictures like Sam 23 the Lord

is my shepherd the God being described as a shepherd and and where the the the flock of his pasture or God being a rock or a hiding place well here is the first word picture of the whole book of Psalms and it's the picture of this blessed person being a tree planted by streams of life giving water it's a picture of security a picture of stability and sustainability because the streams ensure constant refreshment it's by streams of water which are flowing by and therefore all the tree needs to do is soak it up by the roots it has everything it needs now in Scotland a tree doesn't really need to be beside a stream of water to be okay there's plenty of water coming out of the sky and in the soil as a result but of course here in Israel this was much more important a tree not by a stream was in trouble dependent on rains that may or may not come but to be planted by streams of water ensures continual refreshment a life line the word of God is like a lifeline to the blessed man and as a result he's this picture of healthy fruitfulness healthy fruitfulness and he yields his fruit in season and his leaf does not weather it's a wonderful picture of being rooted rooted in God's word and so it gives us an incentive a wonderful picture of blessing that if we make the law of the Lord our delight and if we meditate on it day and night we can see that fruitfulness in our own lives and in the lives of our congregations of being that tree by streams of water notice as well that this tree has been planted it hasn't just popped up out of nowhere and that's leading us into what we will see later on when we consider the whole of the Sam that something has to have happened to a person for them to be this righteous blessed person it doesn't happen naturally in our own natural inclinations in our own nature he's been planted by these streams transplanted if you like from one place into this new place of blessing of refreshment of fruitfulness as a result in all that he does he prospers that's not like the prosperity gospel however that in everything he does he gets a Mercedes a six-figure salary and a house in Spain of course as some of these terrible preachers particularly in the States but it's in Britain to prosperity preachers try and say that you will you'll be prosperous in that way but it is an axiom it is an axiom that if a person's lifestyle is characterised by this watchfulness and this shunning of sin and this delight in the law of the Lord and a meditation on it day and night things will go well for him but think of that in the biblical sense think of someone who whatever they did

[21 : 59] prospered but their circumstances weren't what we would describe as always that great I'm thinking of Joseph Joseph now he had a life of great ups and downs and hardships but everything still seemed to prosper because God was with him so that even the jail that he's put in he ends up in charge of and does really well as as the assistant to the jailer but as he goes on he ends up being prime minister if you like of Egypt it was just everywhere he turned wherever he was put he prospered because God was with him he was like that tree by his dream and indeed in Jacob's blessing of Joseph he's described in interestingly similar terms as this fruitful tree that's what it's like and how often do we think that's pretty far actually from from my own spiritual life that's pretty pretty far away I feel maybe dry or distracted or maybe even getting tugged in to the kind of sinful lifestyle or council that's described in in verse one it's like the Sam re centres as a most absolutely essential and that's the word of God in our daily lives as our as our compass as our guide to take us through everything and how off course we can so quickly become when that's not at the centre of our lives it's why it's so good to meet in this way during the week as well as on the Lord's Day to get to ensure we're centred on God's word and thinking about his purposes in our lives so easy to go off course that's what the blessed persons like big contrast coming in verse four what a picture we've had for the first half of the

Sam look how contrasting it is in the second half the wicked are not so literally it's like not the wicked so abrupt it's like a handbrake turn in the middle of the Sam not so the wicked and then the second word picture of the Sam the first one's been this picture of abundance refreshment fruitfulness stability all these good qualities and you couldn't get a bigger contrast could you because the wicked are compared to being like chaff that the wind drives away just the husk of a seed which in antiquity they would separate on a threshing floor and then also winnowed by the process of winnowing with a fork so that you would simply take your winnowing fork and you had this big pile of wheat and chaff that needed to be separated needed the carnal to make flour to make bread and the chaff it was useless and all you needed was just really a puff of wind not like anything we've been having here over the last couple of days you just needed a puff of wind and you would scoop up the pile in your winnowing fork up into the air and the carnal the grain would fall to the ground and the chaff would be gone just blown on the wind driven away by the wind into nowhere the only thing that chaff really could be used for was if a dying fire just needed a quick boost you could get a handful of chaff and throw it on the fire and because it was so dry and light it would just go like that that's all it could be used for it's a haunting picture actually it's a sobering picture of just being compared to that picture before of rootedness and fruitfulness and not weathering to something which has no life in it and which can just be carried along in the slightest puff of wind going nowhere and again I see that in my own life chaff life just driven by all kinds of my own personal ambitions or desires and all the wicked council in the world and no rootedness in God or in his world and so just lost it's a picture of lostness being like chaff in the wind and so what is the destiny then of chaff of the wicked well we see that in verse 5 it's not just a path that you walk on forever with no consequences in either case there's always a destination we're all heading somewhere and for the wicked they will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous there's a judgment coming a great accounting that's going to be had a great reckoning where every wrong is going to be put right and as a result of their wickedness the sinners won't stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous verse 6 for the Lord knows the way of the

righteous but the way of the wicked will perish blessing or perishing blessing or perishing tree by stream or chaff in the wind only two only two types the Lord knows the way of the righteous describes the Lord not just knowing as it being aware of or having knowledge of but knowing in the sense of looking out for caring for looking after knowing the way of the righteous watching out for them on the path of life and guiding them but in the sense of the wicked there on the way to destruction so the first thing to take away if we're in Christ is to see the way that leads to fruitfulness the way to the leads to blessing is to renounce to be turning continually from sin this is not something we do just when we come to faith in Christ and say I repented back then I said a prayer and now all is well it's a continual lifestyle is to be turning away from sin and to be wary of it to be wary of its dangers because it can be so deceptive so deceitful that Satan is the father of lies and he'll lie his way into trying to get us to embrace something sinful but also then to be centred on his word and to realize that is the way that we get refreshment and fruitfulness and not just by going through the motions but by taking delight in it and meditating upon it and making time to do that if we take anything from Sam one it's that if you have a priority in the Christian life it's this his delight is in the law of the Lord that's the way you describe a blessed person in the Bible and so if we want to share in that blessing and that fruitfulness our delight should be in the law of the Lord as well that's all true but when I read this Sam now and particularly before I came to Christ it was like a sword into my heart because I read about this wonderful blessed person who has avoided sinning in every way and instead is in delight is in the law of the Lord and everything he does prospers but I could only really honestly identify myself with the wicked who are like chaff and I knew holding this Sam if you like up to myself as a mirror I could not stand in the congregation of the righteous or stand in the judgment and that really on this basis I was hopeless doomed just going the way of chaff perishing until I realized that we see the fulfillment of this blessed person in

Christ all of scripture speaks of Christ the Psalms speak of him so vividly and we see the fulfillment of this one who never sinned in the one who never ever ever sinned the one who went through all of his life taking his delight in the law of the Lord meditating upon it day and night that was guiding him through his life keeping him close to his father and always doing what pleased him of course he met with sinners and was so compassionate towards him what's described here is not never refusing ever to talk to a sinner because Jesus of course embraced sinners and bid them come to him and was calling them to repentance it describes not sinning and of course there is only one person who fulfilled this picture perfectly Jesus the son of God but here's what's even more amazing so the destiny of the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord is to be like a tree planted by a stream but the destiny of chaff is judgment Christ took the punishment for the unrighteous he took to himself the destiny of chaff he took on himself the punishment that's due to the wicked described in this Psalm the righteous for the unrighteous the godly for the ungodly the perfectly obedient one for the disobedient to transfer us from the path that we were all on which is the path of chaff so that we could be transplanted planted by streams of living water which is our delight which is our life our sustenance moving us from one destiny to another a complete turnaround that's what Christ has done for us and he now bids us to share in his life to draw through the Holy Spirit's indwelling on that living water and to inner measure and as Donald was praying earlier we can never do this perfectly in this life but inner measure to be continually turning from sin and seeking to do God's will according to his word in our lives remembering that only one has done this perfectly and resting in him and in his righteousness never thinking we can earn our righteousness before the but living in a new way nonetheless as a result of what's happened it's so fundamental we were chaff but because of God taking us and putting us and transplanting us next to that stream we can be trees yielding our fruit in season and our leaf never weathering and going and looking forward to a place where we will be fruitful forever a place characterised

when we read about it in the prophecies about glory and the new creation there are these wonderful trees growing everywhere and their leaves do not wither and they all bear fruit it's a picture of fruitfulness for work for where we're destined but we also remember for those not in Christ chaff doesn't just blow around in the wind forever the way of the wicked will perish and this is one of the great impetuses for our evangelism for our witness for our taking the good news of Jesus Christ to others for it was only by grace that we're no longer chaff therefore we share the word of grace with others that they may also become trees planted by streams of water well pray that God would bless his thoughts on his word as we close our meeting tonight we are going to sing from the Scottish

[37 : 24] Psalter and Psalm 34 and verses 17 to 22 and the righteous cry unto the Lord he unto them gives ear and they out of their troubles all by him delivered are I chose this because I had to cry out to God when I realized I had no righteousness of my own and he hears us when we forsake that when we forsake any trust in ourselves and trust in Jesus and what he has done and this is a wonderful prayer to remember that God hears us when we turn to him so we'll sing these verses to God's praise.

The righteous cry unto the Lord he unto them gives ear and they out of their troubles all by him delivered are the Lord is ever nigh to them that be of broken spirit to them he saved it of the poor the dark in heart from tribulation the troubles that afflict the just and number many be but yet of them all the Lord does set him free he carefully his own cream so we're not home colors agencies we Minnesota

Make his slaving ways, shall be her hint of justice.

The Lord redeems his servant's soul, non-perish, not in trust.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that your blessing would be upon us and remain with us, for we ask it in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.