

Rev Kenneth Ferguson: Psalm 1

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] Now for a short time this evening I'd like us to turn to the Book of Psalms and Psalm number one.

Psalm number one from the Book of Psalms and the text is at the very beginning of the Psalm. 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 on. I'd like to say one or two words on these verses.

When we open the Book of Psalms it's as if we open a door on a very varied scene with many people and many expressions being heard. For example in Psalm 122 the Psalmist is full of joy when he hears others exhorting him to go to church. I joyed he said, when to the house of God go up they said to me. And then on the other end of the scale as it were in Psalm 130 we find the Psalmist there at the very depths and he says, Lord from the depths to the I cried.

And then when you look further on in Psalm 139 you find the Psalmist acknowledging that God knows everything about him. He knows every thought in my mind before it formulates into a word which I speak with my tongue and he acknowledges that God knows him wherever he goes even if he goes to the furthest away points of human habitation. He says, the Lord knows where I am and his hand is upon me.

And then coming again to the personal experience we find in Psalm 51 the Psalmist expressing sorrow for his sin. Have mercy upon me O God and cleanse me from my sin. So when you open the book of Psalms it says of all of these scenarios, all of these experiences and activities come up before you because really the book of Psalms is almost like an encyclopedia of human experience particularly the believer's experience.

[3 : 1 0] But in Psalm number one here once we open the door of the book of Psalms it says of the spotlight falls upon two types of people, two types of men archetypal men and the one man is the blessed man and the other man is the wicked man. And between the beginning and the end of the Psalm it's as if there is a total description of what these people are like, their status, their lifestyle and their destiny. And I would like to focus for a short while if I may particularly on the blessed man but towards the end I'm going to highlight the wicked man also by way of contrast and seek to apply the whole to ourselves.

Firstly then a word or two on the man who is said to be blessed. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked and so on. What does it mean when the scripture says of anybody that he or she is blessed? Well if you go back into the Hebrew you find that the word blessed really means straight or level or right. It's as if a builder was putting his plumb line on a wall he was building and he would say well that's exactly plumb and when he put it on the top that's exactly level. When he walked to the end that's exactly right according to what it ought to be. And that's what the word blessed means. Somebody who is right with God. Somebody who is lifestyles straight and upright. Somebody is walking on the level not walking away from the level and from the right path of God. So we see that the status of the blessed man is described by this word in the original. A person who is blessed is a person who has experienced the straightening and blessing and rightening power of God's grace in his life. Now there are three things I want to highlight in relation to that status. First of all in Psalm 65 we have this. The word blessed is used 65 verse 4. Blessed is the man whom thou dost choose and makes that approach to thee. The man that is chosen by God that is elect from all eternity in the day of God's effectual call he is drawn to God by God's gracious power and that means that that man is blessed. He is in a blessed situation having been as it were plucked as a brand from the burning of sin into the bosom of God. And what's more regarding that word blessed used in Psalm 65 it's in the plural and the Hebrew often uses that to intensify the meaning of a particular word. The blessed is the man who is chosen by God by God by him and called effectually in a day of grace to God in order to be saved. Blessed man. The second example I want to bring is from

Psalm 31. Sorry, Psalm 32 verse 1. Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven and whose iniquity is cleansed. And the same plural is used there. All the blessednesses, all the intensity of the privilege, the height of the privilege of the person whose sins are forgiven and whose iniquity is taken away. And then of course going back to Deuteronomy 33 at the end of that marvellous benediction of Moses upon the children of Israel shortly before he dies, before they go into the land of Canaan having spoken of all the tribes individually. Then he says by way of summary of all of Israel he says happy art thou, always real. You know I'm used in the authorised version quotations. Happy are you, always real. Who is like you, people saved by the Lord. And the same word is used there. All the blessedness, all the privilege, all the straightness, all the wonderful fullness of the privilege of the people who are saved by the Lord. Now we see there is something more in this Psalm regarding the man who is blessed who has that status before God. It talks about his lifestyle, not just his status because God has blessed him in that wonderful way but the person who is blessed has a particular lifestyle described here. And first of all it's described with three negatives. See what it says. 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. These three negatives and then there are positives following. The two positives are he delights in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. The three negatives first of all. The man who is blessed proves that he is blessed by the way he lives. And this is the first thing he mentions here that he doesn't walk in the council of wicked people. People who are morally wrong. People who are off the level. People who are unrighteous. People whose paths are not straight. People who are in other words ungodly sinners. And it says here that the man who is blessed he doesn't stand in the way of sinners. In other words sinners are walking on a particular road doing their worldly business and the business that preaches themselves that appeals to their carnal nature. They go about their business day by day, busily doing their own thing, disregarding God's word and God's law and God's claims upon them. And the man who is blessed he takes a step aside from that kind of lifestyle. He doesn't want to walk in that road. It's too busy.

People going headlong into further sin and a godless life. That's the first thing. And the second thing is not only does he not walk in the council or in the advice or with the lifestyle of these ungodly people. He doesn't stand in the way of sinners. He doesn't stand there. Not only does he not walk on that path but he doesn't stand to admire or in some ways seek to follow anything that they do or say. Just if he takes a wide berth and makes sure that he isn't caught up in the slipstream of these people who are so busy serving sin and serving their own ends. You see we have to be very, very careful. We who profess to know the Lord that we aren't contaminated by the council of the wicked. Whatever council they come with or whatever ways sinners seek to influence us. I was thinking yesterday an old story I heard long ago about somebody who was travelling on a bus. Maybe some of you have heard this. This was I think in one of the mainland cities. And at a certain stop a number of young girls came on the bus and immediately the bus filled with a lovely perfume.

And somebody asked what's the meaning of this? Where have these people been? Or they're working in the factory across there that makes perfume. And it's as if the perfume follows them wherever they go. They can't deny that they're working there because anybody who comes near them will feel this lovely aroma. And that's the way it is here but in the opposite direction.

[13 : 29] When we stand in the way of sinners the attitude of sinners will hold on to our minds, seek to impinge themselves upon to our thinking, seek to influence the way we look at things.

And the things of the world and the things of sin will try and turn us in a direction away from the right path into the way of sin. But the third negative is this. He does not sit in the seat of scoffers or scorers. You see the progression? He doesn't walk in the council of the wicked. He doesn't stand in the way of sinners and he doesn't sit in the seat of scoffers. It's as if there is a possible progression. If you walk in the council of sinners then the next logical step is to stand still there and the next logical step is to sit down and be with the scoffers where they are doing their scoffing. There are three things that I think people scoff at. The first thing that I want to mention is this. Fools make a mock at sin, it says in Proverbs 14 and 9. The same word mock there is the same word as we have here scoffers. Fools mock at sin. In other words it's no big deal to sin. It's as if they mock those who take sin seriously and it's as if they kind and devalue what sin really is. It isn't as serious as all that. People get away with it. You can live this way and that way and you can survive happily enough and if you want to really enjoy yourself there is a level of sin that you have to indulge in. And it says here, these people who think like that in the estimation of the Bible are fools. Fools make a mock at sin. Don't make it. Don't be so foolish. The other thing regarding this mocking is found in Psalm number two. When there are these people gathered around kings and rulers and they teach counsel together against the Lord and he's anointed saying, this is Psalm 2 and 3, let us break their bands in pieces and cast away their cords from us. Who or what are they scoffing? Well they're scoffing at the Lord. They're scoffing at Christ. They're scoffing at the law of the Lord as if it was of no use to them whatsoever. It binds them up. It hems them in. They're not comfortable with the law of God or with the word of God.

The precepts that God has given and they want to break away from these things and the Bible says that they are scoffing and laughing at God and His word. I hope none of us in here take that position. Then of course in the letter of Jude and verse 18 he says this is a constant problem in the world. People mocking at what is right and it says there shall be mockers in the last time. It says walking after their own ungodly lusts, sensual persons seeking to do their own thing, living in sin, mocking at God and His word and the standards of holiness and it says here the blessed man he doesn't live like that. He doesn't live like that. The desire of his heart is to walk in the way of the Lord, to do what pleases him and not what pleases the flesh. And then going on from that we see the lifestyle described in positive terms and there are two positive things. The blessed man is highlighted here as being involved with first of all his delight is in the law of the Lord. The word of God.

The scriptures, the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Psalms which is the word of God that God has given to us inspired and inerrant. The only rule God has given to us by which we ought to live. I came across something interesting the other day. This American author said a dusty Bible indicates a dirty heart. What he meant was if your Bible is sitting there week after week, month after month, year after year, even if you just come to church and open it to find the text then go home and leave it undisturbed until the next week you go. He says it will gather so much dust in that time and a dusty Bible indicates a dirty heart. Well the blessed man here it says that his delight is in the law of the

Lord. He delights in the Bible because he has seen the glory of the God of the Bible and he has had a glimpse of the glory of Christ and he has had a heartwarming experience and a sanctifying experience upon his soul in relation to the scriptures. The scriptures have been read by him, heard by him in the preaching. The scriptures have become precious to him. O blessed are they who hear the sound, the happy sound. Psalm 89 verse 15. O blessed are they who hear the happy sound. And that is a reference in the first instance to the sound of the trumpet of Jubilee at the end of the 50th year in Israel. Everybody who was enslaved was entitled to their freedom at the Jubilee year and the trumpet of Jubilee was blown with all the gusto and all the power that people could bring to bear upon it and the slaves then were able to go free if they wished. And there is a sense in which that is through regarding everyone who is a sinner and who hears the sound of the Gospel and it impacts their heart and their mind and their lives. It's as if it is the sound of liberty and freedom through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ sets the prisoners free and this is what we have here. O greatly blessed the people are, the joyful sound that know.

[21 : 14] Is the Bible that precious to you? That you found in it a Saviour who is able to save even you and whose blood is able to cleanse even you sins. Dark that they might be. Haven't you found in Isaiah chapter 1 verse 18 such a wonderful encouragement to you as you mourn over your sins. The Lord says come now that it's reason to gather saith the Lord though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow though they be like crimson they shall be as wool. Somebody said regarding the reference to scarlet and crimson the scarlet may indicate sins that are public open to everybody's view and that the crimson are so deep. The sins are so deep, brilliant, grained that you just can't shake them off although you may hide them from people's eyes you cannot hide them from God. But the blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse us from all kinds of sin be they scarlet public sins or deep private sins the blood is able to cleanse. I was thinking this afternoon some of you will have heard of the young itinerant evangelist by the name of Finlay Monroe who was on the island here in the 1820s and he was so fervent and zealous for the gospel he was going around various villages and he said in one of his sermons he says there is enough power in one drop of the blood of Christ to cleanse your sin. An old man was in the congregation and the following day the old man thought I'd like to speak to that young man on one point of theology and he went to speak to young Finlay Monroe and he said you said yesterday that there was enough power in one drop of Christ's blood to cleanse the sinner's sin. He said yes I said that well he said I'll tell you which drop it was and it was the last drop.

In other words the old man was saying Christ had to die so that our sins would be taken away and Finlay Monroe says he put his hands up and he acknowledged the old man's wisdom more than his own and he thanked him. The blessed man's lifestyle indicates the kind of union he has with Christ the Savior and he loves Christ's word and he meditates upon the word it says here day and night day and night. This afternoon I was reading something from one of the old Puritans John Trapp and he has some very sometimes very entertaining asides on some parts of the scripture. He was talking about this particular Psalm and this particular verse where the scripture is talking about the meditating upon the word of God day and night that the people of God are exhorted to do and he said you know Pythagoras famous for the Pythagoras mathematics and all of these aspects of philosophy he says he was so fervent in his study of a subject that he didn't want to go to sleep. Obviously he had long hair and he says he would tie a lock of his hair with a bit of string and tie it to a rafter so that when his head started nodding off with sleep he would be jolted up to wakefulness again. John Trapp was saying if he was doing that in the service of his philosophy and his science how much more ought we who have an eternal soul we ought to have that kind of commitment reading and meditating upon the word of God. Well that's a sign then that you are blessed if that is actually through of you. He meditates on his law day and night and the second thing what is this man's what are his prospects his lifestyle in negative terms and positive terms then what is what are his prospects well it says here he is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. He is like a tree he talks later on regarding the wicked and that he is like chaff that wind blows away you know what chaff is it's so light the wind just blows it away but the righteous the blessed man who trusts in Jesus Christ for his salvation he is like a tree planted by the streams of water and the tree has deep roots and the roots are being nourished by the waters of the river I wonder what river this might be well if you read in the book of Revelation you might find a clue when John in Revelation saw a river of the water of life clear as crystal proceeding out from the throne of God and of the lamb he's talking about the river of God's grace and mercy and blessings of covenant salvation and that is the source of life and nutrient at this tree has that this saved person has planted in the means of grace and the word of God

giving all the nourishment we require the blessings of God applying the word of God to our circumstances to our souls these wonderful blessings nourish and strengthen and sanctify our souls as we journey on oh how lightweight the unbeliever is in comparison but then this tree also besides being so stable and well nourished it also yields its fruit in its season a wonderful thing that is if you look in the Bible you'll find that there is a list given of the fruit of the Spirit in the experience of the people of God the fruit of the Spirit is love joy peace long suffering and so on you see there is the peace of God in the experience of those who are blessed there is the love of God there is the joy of the Lord all of these wonderful heavenly blessings come into our experience and we bear fruit more and more unto holiness and the end everlasting life and what's more regarding this tree it says here its leaf does not wither it's an evergreen there's something wonderfully attractive about the evergreen tree sometimes feeling the winter time with the trees that lose their their leaves they seem so bare and so unattractive in some way during the winter months until the springtime comes and the leaves begin to grow again but there's something special about the evergreen isn't there well that's the way the grace of God has dealt with these people here who are named as blessed there is the grace of God within them and that grace will never leave them because the Lord has come to stay and the grace he has planted in your heart the grace of faith and hope and love and all these graces that are saving graces they remain with you oh I know that there are times when you feel pretty low and empty and hard and it's as if the winter the spiritual winter has done its business and you feel as if you've gone be completely denuded of grace but that doesn't happen with the people of God they are evergreen and finally what it says is this all he does prosper the man of God who is blessed who lives in this particular way who bears fruit he is blessed in such a way that everything he does prosper how come that me you look around you you see

Christians with all kinds of problems in their lives all kinds of disappointments in their lives heartaches in their lives how can they be said to be prospering all the scripture says that for them all things work together for their good those who are the called of God according to his purpose in other words even although there are difficulties and heartaches and disappointments and you lose the fight against evil and sin on so many occasions nevertheless God uses all these circumstances to bring you through stronger and more fruitful at the last all he does shall prosper well but then the contrast the contrast is this the wicked are not so they are like the chaff that the wind drives away the wind of sin drives them on see these western films that you see the tumbleweed rolling along just blown by the wind that's the way it is no fixed route they just tumble along and so it is with the sinner he's not anchored to Christ he hasn't got the hand of faith laying hold upon Christ remember the woman with the issue of blood in the gospel you know what you kept saying to herself if I but touch the hem of his garment I shall be whole and her hand may have been very shaky and very weak but she eventually touched the hem of his garment and immediately she felt in herself that she was healed of that plague and so days with you however weak your faith may feel if it's real faith it anchors you to

Christ and nothing shall pluck you out of his hand nothing upon this church upon this Rockies is I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it the chaff is blown away by the wind the wind of sin the wind of temptation isn't it powerful the wind of temptation maybe you've had a problem with some sin or other and you've come to the point where you've said well never again am I going down that particular route and then you go on for a while like that feeling that you've conquered it all and all of a sudden a circumstance comes around maybe you didn't plan to be there or there are people you didn't expect to be there and all of a sudden everything comes together and the temptation becomes overwhelming and you fall in sin again the power of temptation thrives the chaff on but of course the wind of death eventually comes and the wind of death has been blowing since early in the history of the world it started blowing in the garden of Eden when Satan came and tempted Eve regarding the forbidden fruit and it's as if the cold gust of this wind of death came and enveloped her and filled her mind and her affections and her heart and her whole being not only enveloped her but swallowed her up and she fell in the temptation and she ate the fruit and she he gave to Adam and he also ate they fell by disobeying God because this wind of death came along and separated them from their

[36 : 14] God this wind of death is also a wind of physical death there is spiritual death and there is physical death when physical death comes those who are not in Christ will be caught up as chaff is caught up in the raging storm and are carried all the way to a lost eternity or you say I don't believe in hell where is it can you prove to me that hell exists somebody said yes I can prove to you that hell exists where is it then hell is at the end of a Christless life the chaff is blown by the wind therefore it says in verse 5 the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous but the righteous will stand in the judgment it's as if he brings these two types together all the way through to the judgment seat of Christ he says the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked shall perish and when you read the gospel of Matthew chapter 25 you realise there is such graphic detail there of the judgment seat of Christ and Christ as the great judge of all the earth will gather all nations before him and you find that it's just two types of men the sheep and the goats the blessed and the wicked and he will say to the blessed those who have his right hand who are the sheep come you blessed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world and he says to those on his left hand who are the goats and who continue in their wickedness until their dying minute depart from me he cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels so we've seen as it were in the entrance to the book of Psalms ultimate realities regarding those who are blessed and those who are not who are the wicked how can this be applied well I think it needs to be applied by way of challenge by way of exhortation that we examine ourselves as to whether we find ourselves among the blessed or among the wicked do we walk in the council of the wicked are we happy with that council and on that road do we stand in the way of sinners are we happy to listen and to obey and to follow the pattern of life that they live do we sit in the seat of scorners scorning sin as it were it's no problem I can get away with it or are we afraid of that kind of lifestyle and turn away from it seeking to be found in Christ the sinner's area and to be found in him not having your own righteousness do we delight in the law of God the wicked don't delight in it they want to break the bands of God from them do we meditate upon the law of God do we find it a delight to

sit with the Bible and read for our own edification and growth in grace well my friends it's very plainly said out before us and I pray that each of us might be like this tree that is planted by God's sure hand in a day of grace by the streams of water the water of life we might yield fruit unto his glory and the end everlasting life may God bless these thoughts to us let us pray.