

TWO PORTRAITS IN ONE FRAME

Psalm 1

In this Psalm we have the pictures of two men, the godly and the ungodly, or the happy and the unhappy.

I. The Godly or Happy Man. Psalm 1:1-3.

Happiness is one thing for which all mankind is striving. Every one wants to be happy. This desire for happiness is interwoven inextricably with our ideas of life. Whether young or old, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, saved or unsaved, all are pursuing happiness. All of us are convinced that it is desirable and valuable. In spite of everything that contradicts and antagonizes, man holds with determination to the possibility of being happy. While he has many troubles and discouragements, he does not doubt his capacity for joy and his right to be happy. Sincerely believing that happiness is desirable, reasonable, and possible, man is constantly searching for it. Of course, much of the effort to secure it is made in the wrong way. If our efforts to secure happiness were only put forth in the right direction, many of our cups would be filled to overflowing. Inasmuch as we are striving to be happy, and the Lord wants us to be, it is exceedingly important that we understand that real and abiding happiness is dependent not upon what we have in our hands, but upon what we have in our hearts. If you would be happy, you must know Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour and then give yourself in loving and helpful service to others. The more helpful you are the happier you will be. Whenever you lift another's burden you will certainly lighten your own.

We have before us the Old Testament portrait of a happy man. It is the picture of one who is certainly happy even now, who has a joy of which neither crosses nor losses can deprive him, who will be happy as long as he lives, and who has still more happiness in store for him in the life beyond. However, the way of life for the happy man is marked by certain abstinences and avoidances. The point for us to remember is that happiness is not to be drifted into, but whoever would be happy must meet certain obstacles and overcome them. Like every other worthy thing, happiness is to be fought for and won. This is how the world is built -- the best things do not fall into our hands and stay there unchallenged. There is always a lion in the path to the delectable fields. Behind the serenity of the saints is a struggle of soul. He who is declared to be blessed or happy is described, first in accordance with that which he does not do, and then in accordance with that which he does.

1. What The Happy Man Does Not Do.

The Psalmists sets out the fact that the road to happiness and prosperity is one that is shut within certain limits. There are some things that the man who would make a real success simply cannot do. This fact may be disappointing to some, because we are prone to be very impatient if we are under restraints of any kind. We seem to have a passion for doing absolutely as we please. But resent it how we may, the way to real success can only be travelled by those who are willing to make certain very definite refusals. Every happy, successful, and prosperous life is circumscribed by certain great refusals.

- (1) He does not walk in the counsel of the self-willed. Happy is the man who shuns bad company. Blessed is the man who avoids the counsel of the ungodly. Who are the ungodly? They do not have to be dishonest and crooked in their dealings, nor do they have to be rakes and libertines. They may be perfectly decent and respectable. The ungodly are those who are loose from God and have no fear of Him. They are out of touch with Him. They are the people who reckon without God. They ignore God and live as if there were no God. Their thoughts, purposes, and conduct are not in harmony with His teachings. They

do not please Him. They allow life to be conformed to the advice and the pattern of an outside influence. To walk in the counsel of the ungodly is to take their advice and to pattern our lives after theirs. Taking bad advice, or seeking the advice of bad men or those who ignore God, is a downward step. All deeds come from ideas; if the ideas are bad, then the deeds will be bad. If the ideas are pure, then the deeds will be noble. To walk in the counsel of those who live without God will cause any person to miss happiness, success, and prosperity. Oh, the happiness of one who refuses to walk in the way cherished by the ungodly! The righteous man refuses to hear and accept the counsel of men of this character. He finds his life principles and pattern elsewhere.

(2) He does not stand in the way of sinners.

The ungodly are those who live without God. The sinners are those who live in opposition to God. They own no authority but their own will, and recognize no law but their own desires. They miss the mark and go astray from the path of right. They are the persons who love sin, who roll it under the tongue as a sweet morsel, and who intend to indulge in it whenever and wherever the opportunity affords itself. Standing in the way of sinners marks a lower step than walking in the counsel of the ungodly. To stand denotes a decaying sensitiveness to sin. It indicates that the individual is losing his antagonism to evil, and that, on the contrary, he is being brought under its spell. Sin is always progressive. It is easy to pass from a thought to a practice, from walking to standing. But in so doing you are certainly killing all chances of winning happiness, success, and prosperity. The way of sinners is the way of disappointment, of unhappiness, and of sorrow. That way may seem very attractive, but it is sure to end in misery and regret.

(3) He does not sit in the seat of the scornful.

The ungodly live without God, the sinners live in opposition to God, and the scornful have a contempt for God. To take the scorner's seat is to be in the lowest place possible. The scorner has a spirit of proud self-sufficiency. The scorner is the worst type of sinner. He has stopped believing in the good of life. As he sits on the side lines and watches the struggles of his fellows, he sneers and snarls and growls. He barks contemptuously at everything and everybody. He is a self-appointed critic of others. He thinks he knows human nature to perfection. He can see more through a cobwebbed keyhole than others can see through a plate glass window. He laughs at all high motives, and brands all those who are doing things worthwhile as hypocrites. To them there are no heroes.

Never allow yourself to get cynical. Cynicism sours a person on life. It chills the soul and blights the life. It makes one bitter and resentful, critical and caustic, snobbish and sordid, morose and morbid. I can think of nothing meaner than robbing another of his faith, his ambitions, or his aspirations. I admire Sir Walter Scott who, near the end of his life, said, "I have been the most voluminous author of my day. It is a comfort to me to think that I have tried to unsettle no man's faith, to corrupt no man's principles." Shun those who ridicule religion and laugh at those who fear, love, and serve the Lord. Remember that you will never find a happy, successful, and prosperous person walking in the counsel of the ungodly, standing in the way of sinners, or sitting in the seat of scornful.

2. What The Happy Man Does.

(1) He shuns bad company.

He avoids bad thoughts, words, and conduct.

(2) He delights in the Word of God.

He reads it gladly, frequently, thoughtfully, prayerfully, submissively, obediently, and profitably.

In it he finds enrichment for his mind, cheer for his heart, and God's message for his soul. Through all the changing years it remains as fresh as the first rose in May, and as inexhaustible as a gushing spring from the hills. The more he reads the greater his delight.

(3) He flourishes perennially.

"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."

A tree is planted by the Lord, near the water, the best place for growth, under His supervision and care. The tree is growing in stately glory, clothed in beauty, and laden with fruit that is timely. It is a living thing which expands and develops its resources day by day. What a beautiful comparison! How full of rich and pleasing imagery, suggesting every idea calculated to soften the heart, expand the feelings, or exalt the imagination! What a wonderful thing a tree is! With infallible instinct it feels out and finds what it needs. It gathers food from the soil. It drinks from the stream and the sky. It bows to the winds and bends to the storms and blushes under the warm gaze of the ardent sun. Think of how responsive a tree is! It responds to the seasons. It stores up in itself the record of all it does. It draws a circle around its heart for each passing year. It carries to its grave the kiss of every sunbeam, the influence of every raindrop, the caress of every zephyr, and the stroke of every thunderbolt.

Yes, a tree is a wonderful thing. It takes God to grow trees. It takes Him a thousand years to grow some trees. And yet a tree that required many years for God to grow, a man in one brief hour may kill. Thank God for trees! I should not like to live where there are none. Remember Joyce Kilmer's poem, entitled, "TREES".

"I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree,

A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast,

A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray,

A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree."

However, this psalm is something more than the recital of the glory of a tree. It is a tree reciting the glory of a man. Wonderful as is a tree, there is something more wonderful, and that is a soul. Wherever you find an informed Christian, you will find that he has at least three qualities that the tree does:--

a. Firmness.

"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water." Picture the roots of that tree as they strike deeper and deeper and reach out wider and wider, twining themselves around the ribs of the world. The storms howl around it, but it still stands erect and firm and unbending. And we have only to think of some of the good men and women whom we have known to recall, with profound gratitude, the firmness that characterized them. We always knew where to find them. On any moral issue that arose, we always knew beforehand which side they would be on. And having taken their stand on the side of right nothing could move them to depart from it. They were not blown about by the winds of expediency, as so many are. Bribes could not tempt them, nor could threats terrorize them. There they stood, firm in the right as God gave them to see the right. And when we thought or talked about them we spoke of their "strength of character." Firmness is one characteristic of good men. And such firmness is of immeasurable help to others.

b. Fruitfulness.

"That bringeth forth his fruit in his season."

Sometimes our fruit-growers have a disappointing year. Trees which in former years had been laden with fruit happen, for once, to bear none. To all appearances they are healthy and vigorous, yet they fail to bear fruit. There are people who resemble those trees. They have great gifts of body and mind, and fortune is kind to them. They rise to positions of influence; they wield great power among men. Superficially they appear to be successful people, but they have to be placed among this world's failures.

c. Freshness.

"His leaf also shall not wither." The picture is that of a tree whose leaves remain green not only through all the seasons of the year but throughout the whole life of the tree. When it is many years old its leaves are as green as when it was first planted. And what is this but the picture of the good man who keeps, even unto his old age, his interest in life, his zest for life, and his conviction that life is blessed and good? How different from Byron who said,

"My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worn, the canker and the grief
Are mine alone."

What this old world needs is good men and good women who are as trees planted by the rivers of water. It is not what we have, after all, that counts in the long run, it is what we are and what we do. It is not how fast we are going, but where we are going.

II. The Ungodly or Unhappy Man. Psalm 1:4-6.

In contrast with the godly or happy man is the portrait of the ungodly or unhappy man. His character, conduct and destiny are all wrong because he has left God out of his life.

1. He is like chaff.

- (1) Unsightly.
- (2) Unstable.
- (3) Useless.
- (4) Worthless.

With the grain gone and nothing but the husk left, the chaff is without value.

(5) Powerless.

The ungodly "are like the chaff which the wind driveth away."

2. He will be justified in the judgment.
3. His companionship with the righteous will terminate.
4. His end will be destruction.
"The ungodly shall perish."

If you would be happy, successful and useful, then accept Christ as your Saviour and live within the circle of God's will for you.