



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 4

June 16, 2024

Blessed is the Man

Psalm 1

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; ² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

³ *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. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

⁵ *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

Have you ever looked at someone whose life was going so well that you couldn't help but admire him and the blessings God had given him? It's not that you were jealous, but there was just a little positive envy and a longing to have that kind of life. How blessed is that man, how happy he is. How I would love to be so blessed.

This is how the Book of Psalms begins – talking about what a blessed man looks like. We all have our opinion, do we not? What does it look like in your mind's eye to be a blessed man? Is he wealthy? Is he successful? Is he famous, athletically gifted, artistically talented, or intellectually brilliant? Does he have a beautiful wife, doting children, a quiver full of grandchildren? Does he wield great influence? Is he politically powerful? What's your view of a blessed man?

And how did he get to be so blessed? Was it something he did? Was it something he didn't do? It's tempting, when we see the psalmist say things like: "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," to think that he's blessed because he avoids sinful behavior. He doesn't listen to the advice of wicked people, he doesn't take his stand with sinners, nor does he associate with those who mock the Law of God.

And when we read: "His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night," we may be led to believe that it's his attentiveness to God's Law that's the source of his blessings.

But then the psalmist takes an interesting turn. 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 last I checked, trees don't do anything. They don't make



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decisions, they don't choose between right and wrong, they just are. They yield the fruit God designed them to make, and, as long as they have access to the things they need – water, sunlight, nutrients from the earth – they'll keep producing for many, many years. When the psalmist says that the blessed man is like this, what's he saying? People who meditate on the Law of the Lord generally have healthy, productive lives. The Law of God – the Torah – is the source of life for them. They drink it up and it makes them strong and healthy. So, it's not about doing good things and being rewarded, nor is it about avoiding evil things and not being punished. It's about being connected to the source of life and receiving from that source the good things that make us healthy, strong, and just generally blessed, so that we will produce the fruit God has intended for us to produce.

This stands in contrast to how the psalmist presents the wicked – and oh, what a contrast! “The wicked . . . are like chaff that the wind drives away.” The wicked are not connected to the source of life; therefore, they do not bear fruit. In fact, they are the part of the plant – the dead part – that gets separated at the harvest. In those days, the grain would be harvested, stalk and all, and brought into the threshing house, where it would be beaten, thus separating the grain from the stalk. The threshing house was a structure open at both ends, so a breeze would come through. After the grain had been separated from the stalk, it would all be thrown into the air and the breeze would blow the chaff away, while the grain would fall to the floor and be collected. The psalmist says that the wicked are like that chaff, which is blown away and discarded. It's dead; it is of no use.

“The wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” They're dead; they are of no use.

So . . . if it's not doing the right things or avoiding the wrong things, how does a blessed man get to be a blessed man, and not a wicked man? In other words, how does he get connected to the source of life so that he may receive the things that make him healthy, strong, and productive?

The Lord says through the prophet Ezekiel in today's Old Testament, “I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar” (Eze. 17:22-23).

The psalmist says that the man is blessed because he's been planted; he's been chosen. His delight is in the Law of the Lord because that delight has been given to him. It's a gift, not an achievement. Someone else has done the planting; the *Lord* has done the planting. There's no choice to be made. You're either a tree or the chaff; you either delight in the Law of God, or you don't. You who delight in the Law of God have been chosen for this purpose. You've been redeemed by the Planter.

How did this happen? *When* did it happen? It happened on a hill just outside Jerusalem in the year 33 AD, when Jesus, the Son of God, was lifted up on a cross, where



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He suffered and died for the sins of all mankind. He connected you to His payment for sin when you came to faith in Him as your Savior, which He also accomplished through His Means of Grace, His holy Word and Sacraments. When you came to faith in Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you were removed from the realm of the wicked and transported into the kingdom of grace, and you became one of the blessed.

Some people believe that they're blessed because they've done this or that, or have avoided doing this or that. They think that throughout their lives they've been moving by their own choice toward blessedness, but the reality is, if they *are* on the path of blessedness, it's by virtue of having been blessed that they've been moving. They haven't been searching for blessedness; blessedness has sought and found them.

Beloved, you're not a believer today because you searched and found your life in Christ. You're a Christian today because Christ has searched and found you. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). If you think the Lord just met you when you "found" Him, remember what Jesus said to Nathanael, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (John 1:48); or what Paul writes to the Ephesians, "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph. 1:4).

Psalm 1 says it this way: "The LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." David will later write, "O LORD, you have searched me and known me!" (Ps. 139:1) Dear friend, the Lord knows who you are. He knows your life story. How does He know? Because He created you. He created the path you're following. He carved that path through the jungle of this world so that you would find Him. St. Paul, speaking to those gathered at the Areopagus in Athens, said that "God determined our boundaries, so that we would seek Him, feeling our way toward Him, and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us" [Acts 17:26-27]. It's as though He sets barricades around us, directing our path right to where He may be found. He doesn't force you to stay on that path; you can jump off any time you want, or avoid it altogether. If you want to remain with the wicked and be discarded, that's up to you.

But make no mistake, God wants to be found. He's gone to great lengths to find you. And He wants your life story to intersect with His story. He wants to fill your heart and surround you with His story, that you may have a true Torah-identity, that you will love Him with all your heart, even as He loves you with all of His.

It's a question of identity, really. As Paul writes in our Epistle: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). The most important thing for your life is to know who you are and to know that God has made you what you are: one of the blessed. Knowing this, it doesn't matter what happens to you in this life, whether you're wealthy or poor, athletically gifted or a clumsy oaf like me, artistically talented or one who merely appreciates the talents of others, intellectually



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brilliant or just average, and yes, whether you have an attractive spouse and a loving family. In any case, you will know that you are loved by God and your destiny is to be with Him for all eternity.

You are blessed, beloved, for God has planted you by the streams of His mercy; He has shined His everlasting light on you; and He has fed you with the riches of His love. Thanks be to God! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen