

## Psalms 1 and 2 sermon

The Book of Psalms has been called the Hymn Book of the Church. Here we have 150 songs that take in the whole gamut of human experience. There are songs of love and hate, of joy and sorrow, of deep intimacy with God and of profound disillusionment with God. People talk about certain albums being the soundtrack to their youth. This is the soundtrack to the lives of God's people. No matter where you are in life you can find in Psalms a song to suit. And so people love the Psalms because they resonate so much with our lives.

But actually God doesn't want just anybody picking up His song book and starting singing. Any more than the Royal Opera House would be pleased if you went to the opera and decided to join in. That's frowned on. Only certain people are invited to sing at the Opera House, and only certain people are allowed into the Psalms.

That's why Psalms 1 and 2 are often called the gateway to the Psalms. Before we charge on in and start singing these songs for ourselves, we are stopped at this checkpoint. And these two Psalms will instruct us in the basics. Only certain people can proceed and Psalms 1 and 2 will tell us, who's in and who's out. We have here a gateway.

Just like in the sermon on the mount. You know just before Jesus launches into His longest sermon, He has a little gateway called the beatitudes where Jesus will explain what kind of person can be in God's Kingdom. And the person who is *in* is called 'Blessed.' 'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' The one who's blessed is the one who belongs. To be blessed is to be allowed in through the gate. And just as the gateway to *Jesus'* sermon begins and ends with telling us who is blessed, so the gateway to the Psalms begins and ends by telling us who is blessed. Do you see the first verse of Psalm 1 – 'Blessed is the man...' And then do you see in the last verse of Psalm 2 'Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him.' This gateway to the Psalms tells us who's in and who's out. To put it in other words – it tells us who's righteous and who's wicked.

Psalms 1 and 2 are both about this basic theme. Who's in, who's out, who's righteous, who's wicked?

In Psalm 1 we see the difference between the righteous and the wicked. In Psalm 2 we see war between the righteous and the wicked. Psalm 1 lays the righteous and the wicked side by side, in Psalm 2 they go head to head.

That's why traditionally people have taken these two Psalms together, because together they function as the gateway to Psalms. Together they make it plain: who's in and who's out.

Here's who's in – verses 1 and 2:

Blessed is the Man Who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. <sup>2</sup> But His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law He meditates day and night.

And you read that and you think, I know what that's saying – it's saying that the kind of person who's *in* is the person who (v1) avoids peer pressure and (v2) reads their Bible lots. (That's what 'the law of the LORD' means in v2, it's another way of describing the Scriptures). So, you read this and you think, the blessed kind of person stays away from bad influences and they have their noses in the Bible. And then you say – v3, that kind of person lives a fruitful Christian life, but v4, the other kind of person is not like that, they're not fruitful and so they will face judgement. That's often the first impression people get when they read these verses, and there's great truth to that interpretation, but it's not quite what Psalm 1 is saying.

Look again at verse 1: there isn't a group of people mentioned here. There is just one blessed man. In verse 4 it's in the plural – there are lots of wicked people. But, v1, just one man who is called blessed. It's quite emphatic in the original. There would be ways the Psalmist could have said 'Blessed is anyone who reads their Bible.' And there would be ways he could have said 'Blessed is the kind of guy who reads his Bible.' But this verse is saying emphatically 'Blessed is that guy right there. The One meditating on His Bible day and night. *He's* the blessed one – the Man.'

In Australia there was a rugby league footballer called Anthony Mundine who quit football and took up boxing. And he became this undefeated champion and soon he asked people simply to refer to him as 'The Man.' I know what you're thinking – arrogant Australians – and you might be right. Wasn't it Elle McPherson who was known as 'The Body'? Other women have bodies but Elle McPherson has *the* Body by which all bodies are judged. It's like that with Anthony Mundine – the Man. He wants to be known as the definition of manhood. All men are relative to the Man. How arrogant. I'm rarely so bold as to call myself a man. Even that's a stretch. But 'the Man'.

'The Man' is a very exalted title. We still have a sense of this in some parts of the English speaking world. I remember once my father-in-law from Belfast said to me: "Now your man is quite conservative." My *man* is quite conservative? He meant the Australian Prime Minister – your man. And in the Bible 'the Man' also has overtones of being a ruler. For instance Joseph is often called 'the man' in Egypt. He's the man – He's Pharaoh's right hand man, the guy that get's things done, if you want something done in Egypt go to the Man. It's often the title for a ruler.

And that fits in well with verse 2, because in v2 we see that the Man meditates on the Bible day and night. And that is something that particularly the *King* was meant to do. Turn with me to Deuteronomy 17:18-20 (p ). Here we see what the King ought to do when He takes the throne of Israel:

<sup>18</sup> When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. <sup>19</sup> It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees <sup>20</sup> and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.

The King, above all people, is meant to be an avid Bible student. Flick on a few pages to Joshua 1:8. (p            ). This is what the very next ruler of Israel is told. As Joshua becomes ruler he is told (Joshua 1:8):

<sup>8</sup> Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

The King is the one who meditates on the Law day and night. And then he is prosperous. Well we already know that from Psalm 1. In v3 we see that the Man becomes a prosperous tree (same word as in Joshua 1). And, as we flick back to Psalm 1, this tree imagery from v3 is often used to describe the promised King of Israel. The promised King is often called things like 'The Branch' or the Root or He's likened to a vine.

When you put all this together you get the picture that the Man of Psalm 1 is in fact the King of Psalm 2. The Man of Psalm 1 is the Anointed One (or Messiah or Christ, it's all the same word) from Psalm 2:2. The Man is the Christ, the Son of God.

So you see in both Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 you have a contrast – not between one *group* of good guys and another *group* of bad guys. In both Psalms you have one man, the King, who is God's Righteous, Anointed, Blessed, Beloved Son and then you have the wicked, the other kings of the earth, the sinners, the mockers, the rebels. And the message of these Psalms is *not* 'Don't belong to the bad guys, belong to the good guys.' The message of these Psalms is 'Don't belong to the wicked, belong to the Blessed Man.' Belong to Christ, the Son of God.

See, take the beginning and end of these two Psalms together and you get the whole message of the Bible in a nutshell. Psalm 1:1 'Blessed is the Man' and Psalm 2:12 'Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him.' That's the gospel right there. Blessed is the Man and blessed are all those who take refuge in Him.

Christ is the One Blessed Man, but He doesn't keep His blessedness to Himself. It's a blessing that's available for all who come to Him. So, v3 – He is likened to a tree which sounds remarkably like the tree of life – which is also planted by a river and has evergreen fruit. Well the Blessed Man, Christ, is like the tree of life. To come to Him is to receive the Life and blessing that He has received from His Father. And at the end of v3 'everything He does prospers.' Really that's better translated 'He causes it to prosper.' He doesn't just thrive, He

makes others thrive. He's a tree with a green thumb if you can handle the mixing of metaphors. He's a prosperous tree and He makes others into prosperous trees when they come to Him.

And that's where we fit in in this Psalm. We are those who take shelter in Christ, those who feed on the tree of life, those who are blessed in the Blessed Man. And so more and more we will be people, v1, who refuse to go along with the wicked crowd. More and more, v2, we will be people who love the Scriptures and meditate on them daily. If Christ is Scripture saturated, if He thrives on the Bible, then can we expect to flourish any other way? No if we've taken refuge in Jesus, more and more we will become blessed Bible meditators too. And more and more, verse 3, we will bear fruit in the Christian life. We can't generate this kind of life ourselves but in friendship with Jesus His blessing will flow through our lives.

And so at the end of v3 we're left gazing on a flourishing tree – a picture of Christ bestowing His fruitfulness on His people. And it's a picture of security, strength, plenty. It's thriving, abundant, evergreen, lush, verdent, prosperous, full of life and vitality and all those words they use to sell bottled water. Blessed is the Man and blessed are all those who take refuge in Him.

But, v4,

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

Verse 4 is such a shift of gears. We have left the verdent garden and now we're in a dry wasteland. What is chaff? Take away everything that is fruitful and alive from verse 3 and you get chaff. The farmer brings in the harvest – there's wheat and there's chaff – the dead, dry husk around the wheat. On a windy day, the farmer throws the wheat up in the air and the wheat has weight and substance and so it falls back down again onto his sack. The chaff blows away in the wind. Insubstantial, lifeless, useless, worthless. And when the day of sifting comes, it's blown away. That's the wicked.

And the word wicked doesn't mean the grossly immoral person over there. The wicked are all those who have not drawn life from this tree of blessing. The wicked are simply those who haven't come to Christ.

Jesus says in John 15 – 'I am the vine, you are the branches.' He says 'Apart from me, you can do nothing.' Take a branch away from the vine, leave it on the ground and what do you have? Fire-wood. Worthless, lifeless. Take a person out of a vital relationship with Jesus Christ and what do you have? Chaff.

And so verses 5-6

<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. <sup>6</sup> For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

There are just two sides to be on and it matters very much which side you're on. The LORD is watching and there will be a day when He will sift us all and separate the wheat from the chaff. Those who are with Christ, the Blessed man, they will stand. Those who are not with Christ, those who are with the wicked will perish everlastingly.

This is the gateway to the Psalms. And we are being asked: Where do we stand? Are we in or out? Are we with Christ, the Blessed Man, or are we going to be blown away?

Well Psalm 2 picks up this theme straight away and asks 'Why wouldn't you stand with Christ? Why wouldn't everyone join in with Him? Why would anyone oppose Him?'

Verses 1 and 2

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One (Messiah/Christ).

Here the imagery has shifted from botanical to battlefield. Here is the war between the righteous and the wicked.

The nations, the peoples, the kings of the earth, the rulers – are all conspirators, plotting against the LORD and against His Anointed King, Christ.

Maybe you read that and you think. God is paranoid. There isn't this massive conspiracy against Him. Is this sensationalist propaganda from the Psalms? No, the Bible insists that this conspiracy against the Father and His Son is a universal phenomenon. We are all rebels.

**If you don't recognize that you reject God's rule, look on to verse 3 and see if this is not the cry of your own heart: (here is what rebellious humanity says –v3)**

**“Let us break their chains” they say “and throw off their fetters.”**

(fettters are just cords that tie you up). Here's the picture: God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ have a big rope around you. What do you want to do with that rope? What does your heart say? It says, "Let's break their chains, let's throw off their bonds."

We don't want any restraints, we don't want any boundaries, we don't want any limits on what we can and can't do.

Now in Hosea 11:4, God says 'I am leading you with cords of human kindness, with ties of love.' (same words as here) God says, 'I have got a rope around you, but it's there to catch you, to lead you and to guide you. Every restraint I put on you is for your own good – to lead you with kindness.'

What do our hearts say? 'Let's break their chains and throw off their fettters.'

Think of that famous line in Titanic. Leonardo Di Caprio declares – "I am the king of the world." And you think – no you're not. Your travelling 3<sup>rd</sup> class in a hulking great death trap. But that's not how he feels, he's left the old country behind, heading to the new world, the wind's in his hair and he feels free. So he declares himself king. But he's not king and the ship's about to go down. That's a picture of you and me. We try to free ourselves from Christ and make ourselves kings and queens.

But Psalm 2 says: that is mutiny and it's all in vain.

Because, v6 and 7 tell us, God the Father has installed His Son as King. The ruler of my world is not me – however much I may mutiny, it's all in vain. Christ is the King and His rule extends, v8 and 9, to all peoples, in all lands at all times.

And so this gateway to the Psalms ends with a warning. Verse 10:

Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth.

No-one likes warnings, but let me tell you, warnings are wonderful things. What those motorists in Minnesota would have given for a warning. 'The bridge is out, turn back.' But there was no warning and so they plunged into tragedy. God the Father does not want anyone to face judgement unwarned.

So here is His warning, v11:

Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for His wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.

Here's the warning. You've mutinied against Christ the Son of God to whom all things belong. But He has been installed as the true King and He is angry at this rebellion, so run. And at that point you think, too right I'm going to run. But v12 doesn't say run away from Him it tells us to run to Him.

Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him.

Christ is coming, flee. But don't flee away – you've done enough of that in your life, flee to Him. Because Christ is not only our King and Judge, He is also our Refuge.

What is a refuge? It's a shelter which takes an onslaught that you can't take. So it rains, you take refuge under an umbrella – it gets wet, so you don't. Or there's bombs falling, so you take refuge underground. The ground is hit, you're kept safe.

Verse 12 says – Jesus is a refuge for rebels fleeing judgement.

He accomplished this at the cross. There the King and the Judge of All, took the onslaught of judgement on Himself so He could keep us safe.

Now to those who take refuge in Jesus, the Judge turns out to be our Saviour. And if the Judge is your Saviour you really are safe. Can you imagine being on trial for some crime and right before you go into court your lawyer tells you, 'Don't worry I promise I'll get you off.' That brings you some kind of comfort. But imagine that before you go into court the prosecutor and the judge come up to you and say 'Don't worry, I promise I'll get you off.' Then you'd feel pretty confident. The Christian has that confidence about judgement. Our Saviour is the Judge Himself, no-one will overturn His ruling.

Well here is the gateway to the Psalms. Blessed is the Man and blessed are all who take refuge in Him. And because this is the kind of gateway we've been given we see two things:

First it tells us that the Psalms must be related to Christ.

Second it tells us we must be related to Christ.

Firstly, if this is the gateway to the Psalms, it shows us that the Psalms are not a random collection of songs, but they find their logic and centre in Jesus Christ. The Psalms are centred on Him. It's a bit like Handel's 'Messiah.' Handel organised all his songs around Christ, to show Him off. And in the same way, the Psalms are an organised work designed to show off the Messiah, the Blessed Man in whom is all our blessing. All of the Psalms, both individually and as a collection, work together to show Him off in a different way. And this gateway to the Psalms sets us up for seeing the ways the Psalms will do that.

This gateway has introduced us to the four main characters that will inhabit the next 148 Psalms. There is (1) the LORD; (2) the Christ, the Blessed Man; (3) The Righteous who take refuge in Him; and (4) The Wicked who oppose Him. All the Psalms are about the interaction of these four groups. In some, like Psalm 1, the Blessed Man is shown before the LORD and then the righteous and the wicked are contrasted. In some, like Psalm 2, the righteous complain to the LORD about the wicked and then He reminds them about the Blessed Man, Christ. In some we have simply the words of Christ. In others we have the words of the LORD *to* Christ. In some we simply have the words of sinners like us taking refuge in Him. But all of the Psalms are about the inter-relation of these four groups. And they all work together to speak to us of Christ. Let's be alert to that as we read the Psalms, they are related to Christ.

Secondly, we must be related to Christ. These Psalms tell us Christ is the Man, the tree of life, the Anointed One, the King, the Son, the Judge and the Refuge. He couldn't be bigger. But who are we? We are only what Christ makes of us. We are entirely defined by which side of Jesus we stand on. Either He is our King, our tree of life, our Refuge or else He is our wrathful Judge. We run from Him and are judged or we run to Him and are saved – either way He is exalted as King.

So tonight, the LORD watches over us. He knows on which side we stand. But perhaps tonight some of us could switch sides and take refuge in Him. Let's close by looking down at our Bibles. And let me draw attention to some of these images from these Psalms. Perhaps for some here it will be an opportunity to turn from rebellion to refuge.

Let's everyone look down at Psalm 1:3: Christ is like the blessed tree of life. Will you come to Him and say, 'Please give me your life and blessing.'

Look at Psalm 2:3. The Father and the Son have a big rope around you. Will you come to Christ and say 'I submit to your cords of kindness, save me, guide me, lead me by them.'

Look at Psalm 2:6: The Father installs the King of the world. Will you come to Him and call Him your King.

Look at Psalm 2:11. Serve the LORD. Have you had enough of serving yourself? Will you now turn and serve Him?

Look at Psalm 2:12: Kiss the Son. He's the One who died to make a shelter for you. Do you have affection for Him? Will you tell Him you love Him?

Christ is the refuge. Will you tell Him you need shelter?

Let's pray: