

Worship the King
A Christ-centered Joy: Psalm 1
Sunday, May 4th, 2025
By Ryan Perry

Scripture

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.***

Let's Pray

Introduction:

Today marks the start of a new series called "Worship the King." This series is going to take us through May and June, and then I will finish it up once I am back from the 2nd half of my sabbatical in August.

Now, what I am going to do in this series is actually something the student ministry has been doing all year. I am going to focus on one psalm each week, and my main goal is to show you how it points to or is fulfilled in Jesus.

Because the Psalms are more than merely a book of songs. They really are messages of hope. That God is going to fulfill his promises to his people by giving them the deliverance and the Davidic Messiah that they've been waiting and longing for.

This means that every Psalm, in one way or another, is ultimately pointing us to Christ.

So this morning, we are going to start with Psalm 1. Now, I will say up front that I preached this psalm roughly 2 years ago as part of the Route 66 series.

So many of the things that I say today will be very similar to that message. But the reason I want to start here is that most scholars agree that this serves as an introduction to the whole Psalter or hymnbook of Israel.

It orients our hearts to receive these prayers, poems, and songs as God's Word, and it calls us to meditate on and orient our lives around the message that God is communicating through them.

Also, this particular psalm, along with Psalm 2, which we will walk through in two weeks, so easily points us to Christ as their fulfillment.

Now, this psalm is what we would call a wisdom or exhortation psalm. It is an exhortation to reject the ways and loves of this world, while at the same time to delight and immersing ourselves in God's law. **And for us as New Testament Christians, since Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law, it is an exhortation and call to delight and immerse ourselves in Christ.**

And when we do this, the Psalmist says that we will receive a **Godly, or for us, a Christ-centered joy** that bears fruit for God's kingdom, and ultimately leads to the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

So let's begin by looking at the exhortation to reject the loves of the world and to delight and immerse ourselves in Christ as we look at the root of a Christ-centered joy.

The Root of a Christ-centered Joy

Psalm 1:1–2

***[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.***

Now, if you've ever heard a sermon or read a commentary on Psalm 1, one of the things that many pastors and theologians will do is spend a ton of time talking about the difference between the worldly person who is pictured in the wicked, sinners, and scoffers of verse 1 and the man who delights in the Lord in verse 2.

And I will say, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. In fact, we will do something similar in just a bit.

But if we move too quickly to those comparisons, we will miss one of the most important parts of this Psalm. **It's that first word, "Blessed."**

It comes from the word "esher" which in Hebrew means "A state of happiness."

But we need to make an important distinction here. When we think of the idea of being happy, or in a state of happiness, we primarily think about it as a feeling.

“I am happy that it’s sunny today.”

“I am happy that it’s the weekend.”

“I am happy that the government hasn’t imploded yet.”

But this isn’t what the Hebrew word **“esher”** or **“blessed”** is getting at. Instead of it being a mere feeling of happiness, that can change with our circumstances, **it’s pointing to a rooted and lasting joy that comes from being a people who have received an unearned favor and fellowship with God.**

Look with me at the following verses:

Psalm 32:1

***[1] Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.***

Psalm 34:8

***[8] Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!***

God, in accordance with his grace, has fully and freely forgiven us of our sins. Which means that he has brought us into a relationship with himself, and has bestowed upon us the blessing or favor of being his people.

And as Christians, we know that this is a blood-bought favor that was received through Christ and his death on the cross. As it says in Ephesians 1:7:

***[7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses,
according to the riches of his grace,***

So this word **“blessed”** is really important. **Because it roots our lasting joy in the unmerited or unearned favor of God that only belongs to us because of Christ’s work on the cross.**

However, that doesn’t mean that a Christ-centered joy requires nothing of us. If you think back to the covenant that God made with the Israelites on Sinai, it was a free gift, and yet, their ongoing experience of that covenant required them to walk in obedience to God.

Similarly, we all have, as God’s children, the free gift of his favor and fellowship through Christ, but our experience of that favor and fellowship still requires something of us.

As Jesus said in John 14:21:

[21] Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

So, according to the psalmist, if we want to experience the lasting blessings of a joy that flows from our union with Christ, it requires us to do two things.

One, it requires us to put off the self-seeking or self-centered loves of this world.

As it says again in Psalm 1:1:

***[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;***

Now, as we look at this verse, the hymn writer isn't trying to talk about 3 different kinds of evil people, nor is he trying to describe three different kinds of evil activities.

In Hebrew poetry, the writer will write multiple sentences, like this, that seem close in meaning as a way to emphasize one main idea.

And what the writer is trying to describe in verse one is a comprehensive evil that is self-seeking and focused on earthly pleasure and gain. **This kind of person is all about themselves as they continually try to gratify the desires of their flesh as if it were their god.**

But the focus here isn't the evil itself. Rather, it's on the godly person who rejects that way of life.

Because the Psalmist is trying to make it clear that our experience of a Christ-centered and blood-bought joy requires us to reject the self-centered and pleasure-seeking ways of the world around us.

We can't seek worldly pleasure as our first love and expect to experience the lasting joy of God's favor in our lives.

Application

Now, I know that we all know this, and yet we still struggle with it, don't we?

Every day, we are confronted with messages that tell us that something besides Christ can fill us. For example, listen to the following slogans from a few popular companies:

Coke Cola: Open Happiness.

Disneyland: The happiest place on earth.

Burger King: Have it your way.

These might not be the companies of your choice, but these messages still affect us. Because they are a part of a larger culture that is telling us that happiness and satisfaction are either found in a place, a product, or in ourselves.

I can see this so easily in my own life. I don't drink Coke, I don't eat Burger King, nor do I really care about Disneyland. And yet I still find myself thinking things like:

"If I can just save this much money, then we will have enough."

"If I can just get through this next month, then everything will be easier."

"I will be happy if I can accomplish X amount of things within my day."

Now this is just the tip of the iceberg in my own life, but I think it points to a struggle that we all have. **We are all prone to long for and seek after the tangible realities in our world that make us feel good.**

We want to fill ourselves with physical things or achievements because, at times, we are more devoted to our comfort and pleasure than we are to the kingdom of God.

But if we truly want to experience the lasting joy that Christ provides, then we must reject this kind of thinking. We need to reject the self-centered and comfort-seeking desires that can creep into our lives.

Because we cannot say we love God while at the same time loving and living for what the world seeks after.

As Jesus says in Matthew 6:24:

[24] "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money (mammon, possessions, comforts).

We must reject the loves of this world.

But we can't stop there. We can't just reject what the world loves and expect to experience the lasting joy of Christ. There is another part to this equation.

Look with me at Psalm 1:2:

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

Now, the word "**delight**" means "*to take pleasure in, to desire, and to see something as supremely valuable.*" Secondly, the word "**meditate**" means "*to care for, to attend to, and to practice and be diligent in.*"

So the psalmists' point is that if we are going to be people who are supremely happy in God, then we need to see his law or word as supremely valuable. **We need to love it, take pleasure in it, saturate ourselves in it, and put it into practice.**

This is absolutely a true statement from the Psalmist. We need to be people who meditate on and love the Word of God.

But this writer wasn't able to see, in his time, that these words would have their greatest fulfillment in the one who came to fully fulfill the law.

As Jesus said in Matthew 5:17:

[17] “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Our continual experience of a blood-bought joy means that we need to be people who love and take joy in Christ above all other things. We need to see him as supremely valuable.

Because whatever we believe to be supremely valuable and joy-inducing, we will orient our lives around it.

Application

For some, that might be health and wellness. For others, it might be leisure, downtime, and vacations. And for others, it might be their kids, jobs, or a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Yet, as Christians, we are called to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). We are called to see Christ as the greatest treasure who is more pleasurable and worthwhile than anything else in all creation.

In fact, this is the point of Jesus' words in Luke 14:33 when he says:

[33] So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

It's not that we have to literally give up everything in order to follow Jesus. Instead, he wants to be the great and all-satisfying treasure that trumps everything else in our lives, including our families.

So instead of seeking earthly gain and pleasure as our first love, we will treasure Christ, and orient everything in our lives around living out his commands.

As Brother Lawrence said in his book “Practicing the Presence of God:”

“We should put life in our faith. We should give ourselves utterly to God in pure abandonment (giving ourselves fully to and delighting in him), in temporal (earthly) and spiritual matters alike, and find contentment (joy) in the doing of His will (orienting our lives around him), whether he takes us through sufferings or consolations.”

This truly is the path of unspeakable, inexpressible, and lasting joy. It is the root of a Christ-centered Joy.

Now, I realize that I spent a ton of time on that first point, and I did that because it is the most important one. And everything else is what flows from either a joy-filled love for Christ or a lifeless love for this world. So, the next points will be much quicker than the first one.

The next thing we will see is the fruit of a Christ-centered joy.

The Fruit of Christ-centered Joy

Psalm 1:3-4

[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.***

I love the poetic image in verse 3. The person who treasures and delights in Christ and orients their life around him is said to be like a tree that is rooted and planted by streams of water.

You've probably seen something like this. Just go along the Mississippi River, and you will see huge trees on the shore with exposed roots that have grown deep into the river.

And yet, despite their exposed roots, these trees are growing, flourishing, and bearing healthy leaves because they're drinking deeply of the river water.

Similarly, when we as Christians drink deeply from the well of Christ and his Word, the Psalmist says that we too will flourish and bear fruit.

But let's be careful here. Because it is too easy for us to see those words **“yields its fruit”** and **“prospers”** and assume that means that we will be physically or materially blessed.

Now that may happen, and praise God if it does, but the reality is that trees bear fruit for a purpose. And the purpose of a fruit tree that bears fruit is so that it can nourish the people and the animals that may eat from it.

Meaning that the fruit that Christ produces in our lives as a result of delighting in him is ultimately other-focused.

As of first importance, it is about pleasing and glorifying God. As Paul writes in Colossians 1:10.

[10] so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Second, it's about serving others with the love of Christ. As it says in Galatians 5:13–14:

[13] For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. [14] For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

So then the fruit that Christ produces in our lives should not only display the greatness and glory of God, but it should also be working for the good of others.

This will be the result of a life that loves and treasures Christ.

However, if we don’t love or delight in Christ, we need to understand that we are still producing something.

We are producing what the psalmist calls “**chaff.**” Now chaff is the husk of the wheat that isn’t useful for anything. In fact, the wheat sorter would throw the grain up in the air so that the worthless husk would separate from the useful grain. **And the leftover husk or chaff would either be blown away or thrown into a fire to be burned.**

This is also true of a person who doesn’t love Christ. The fruit that they produce in their life, even if they think it’s good, won’t last.

This is the kind of person who is ultimately focused on storing up earthly treasures and pleasures instead of looking to the eternal treasure to come.

So nothing they do will have lasting value, and at the end of their life, they will realize that they wasted it, and spent all of their time seeking something that couldn’t save them

So the question that the psalmist is posing to us this morning is two-fold? One, where is your treasure? Is it found in delighting in Christ and orienting your life around him, or is it found in seeking after earthly and fading pleasures?

Two, what kind of fruit are you producing? Is it a God-glorifying, others-focused fruit, or is it the husk that has no lasting value?

And that second question is important because when we take stock of our life and the fruit we’re producing, we will have a pretty good idea of what we’re loving and delighting in most.

Christ or worldly pleasure.

Which then brings us to the final two verses of this Psalm, where we get the sobering results of either a love for Christ or a love for this world.

Results of Christ-centered Joy

Psalm 1:5-6

**[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.**

The psalmist doesn't mince words here. He doesn't hold back in verse 4 about the fact that loving and delighting in something else besides Christ will produce worthless fruit in your life, **and he doesn't hold back here from letting us know what the results of that kind of life will be.**

This means that even if you call yourself a Christian, if you're not seeking to find your joy in Christ by orienting your life around him, then you are living a life that is ultimately in danger of ending in an eternity apart from him. You're in danger of being "chaff."

And as the Psalmist says, you will not stand in the judgment nor in the congregation of those who have been bought by Christ, but instead you will perish.

As Jesus said in Matthew 7:23:

[23] I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

Because the promise of the present and everlasting joy of Christ is only for those who love Christ, trust him, and seek him. **They are the ones who are known by God, and they are the ones who will spend forever in the eternal congregation of his people.**

Christ

Now, if I were to end the sermon right here, you would probably walk away from it asking yourselves what I believe are the right questions:

Am I loving Jesus more than earthly pleasures? Am I treasuring him above the other things in my life? What do my priorities and my actions reveal about where I find my joy or where I put my trust? Is it in Christ or something else?

These are all great questions. So please, think about them.

But I can also imagine that you may find yourself with an underlying feeling of dread as you do it. Because there will be feelings of inadequacy that creep in as you think about your life and compare it to the man that is pictured in Psalm 1.

I want you to know that's a good and right feeling. Because you will never be able to perfectly rid yourself of the love of this world. You will never be able to perfectly delight in Jesus the way you should. And let's be honest, the fruit that we bear, this side of eternity, will be more like the fruit you would find at Walmart. **Some good and others not so good.**

So if the weight of our eternity rests upon living up to the high standard of this Psalm, then we will fall flat. We will scratch our heads and echo Peter's words when he says to Jesus, "Who can be saved?"

But we need to understand two very important things. One, like I said at the beginning, we have a lasting joy because we have been given an unmerited favor and fellowship with God through Christ.

Which means that our ultimate eternity rests upon Christ, not on our ability to perfectly love him, follow him, or bear fruit for him.

Two, we need to remember that the Psalms are always pointing us to the Messiah, who is greater than we are.

So when we see this picture of a blessed man who rejects evil, delights in God and his word, and perfectly prospers and yields fruit in its seasons, it is really pointing us to Christ as the perfect fulfillment of this Psalm.

This idea was echoed by Augustine when he said, *“Psalm 1, this is to be understood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord man.”*

And because we have been bought and redeemed by his blood, he is the one who perfectly fulfilled this Psalm on our behalf.

So, he not only purchased the unmerited favor of God for us, but he is also the one who secured our eternity with him, and he is the one who, by his Spirit, will help us to turn from evil, and will produce lasting fruit in our lives.

Conclusion

What this means is that if we want the Christ-centered joy that is offered to us in Psalm 1, then we need to run to Jesus. We need to turn from trusting in ourselves, and instead, we need to trust that our eternity has been secured by him, and that by his Spirit, we will yield the fruit that honors God.

Because at the end of the day, this psalm is really a call to faith.

That we would put our hope and trust in Jesus and experience the favor, the fruit, and the joy that he secured for us through his perfect life and his perfect death on the cross.

Let's pray.