

Psalm 1  
August 18, 2019

### “A Fork In the Road”

There is this show I really like. It's called Black Mirror. It gets its name from the reflection you see in a phone screen or tv whenever it isn't in use. Just a simple reflection painted black. It's an anthology series that takes place in these dystopian alternate universes where things usually just go from bad to cataclysmic by the end, usually as an unexpected result caused by technology.

The show gained so much popularity that the creators actually made a full length film exploring the themes present in the show. The movie is about a computer programmer in the late 80's who is designing a video game. It was intended to be a revolutionary game in regards to the fact that the player actually determined the outcome of the game. In the game the player was given choices that not only determined the way each level of the game played out, but would change the entire story of the game. I won't bore you with a history lesson about video games or computer technology but that was a radical idea back then.

The irony of this is that the movie itself is actually interactive. The viewer gets to pick what the main character does, scene by scene, ultimately determining the way the movie ends.

For those of you who might not be following me it's a cinematic version of those "Choose Your Own Adventure" books. Each of the books tells a different story and in each book the reader has a part in determining the outcome of the book by answering questions along the way. For example the book might say, "You're sitting at home minding your own business when there's a knock on the door. What will you do? Answer it or hide in the bathroom?" Let's say that you choose to hide in the bathroom. "As you run for the bathroom, you remember you don't have one and the knocking gets louder. Will you answer the door or run out the backdoor?" Let's pretend that you choose to run out the back door. "Oh no, there are tigers in the backyard. Lots of them. Will you sing them to sleep with a song or charge them?" You choose to sing to them. "Only knowing two songs, which song will you choose: You Are My Sunshine or The Eye of the Tiger?" And so the story goes. These books, much like this movie, and much like the game in the movie are constantly throwing two choices in your way. They keep asking, "Which path will you take? Which road will

you follow?" The choices you make along the way determine how it concludes.

That is a life principle, isn't it? Choices have consequences. It is a spiritual life principle too. It is the lesson that's taught in this Psalm. Psalm 1 opens the entire book of Psalms by asking us a question: "Which path will you follow? Will you follow the Psalms and the rest of the Bible? Will you follow the Lord and His Word and live in fellowship with Him? Or Will you walk on the other path that leads to devastation and destruction? It's the path of the wicked. Which path will you choose?"

### There is the way of Life and Blessing

**There is the way of Life and Blessing.** This psalm starts by describing this first way. Understand, blessing here does not have a North American, Western definition. Blessing here does not mean a house, a three stall garage, vacation trips to Disney, 2 ½ kids playing in the safety of your white picket fence, and sports leagues on the weekend. When this psalm talks about blessing it's using a Biblical definition. It means wholeness, harmony, joy, and peace with God and others. It's something much deeper than a "God bless America" bumper sticker implies.

First, the way of life and blessing is described negatively. The blessed man does not walk, sit, or stand with the wicked. The passage says in verse 1, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked." The path and lifestyle of the blessed man is not with those who are distant from God, The way of the wicked is tempting and alluring. It's appealing. It's a way of pleasure and sometimes acceptance with others, but the blessed person does not order their life by this way.

They also do not stand in the ways of the sinners. Standing means something different than walking. To walk is to keep moving but to stand is to park yourself in a path. It's to stop and engage. It is to smell the "proverbially roses". The blessed person does not get comfortable in the sinner's ways. Then, he or she also does not sit in the seat of mockers. To sit means to make yourself fully at home with a lifestyle. The one who is blessed avoids this. They will not follow the progression into sin. They resist even the first step. Giving no foothold to that which the Psalm is warning us about.

Positively, "He delights in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night." The blessed person finds joy in God's law. They know God's law has answers for life; for marriage, for work, for speech, for

raising children, for worry, for anger, for how to handle temptation. They delight in the law and meditate on it. They reflect on it and mull God's Word over in their mind. They memorize it. They keep thinking about it until it sinks into their heart and becomes part of them.

This can be demurring. Both publicly and privately, there are obstacles. So I like to think of meditating, about praying in the same way that I do something relatable to me. I think about meditating as trying to learn a computer software program. You can read the manual and it will explain how to do certain applications. But unless you read the manual and begin to practice doing what it says on your computer, you'll forget it and it won't be useful. You need to practice. You need to reflect and rethink about what you're reading. Those who are blessed do this with God's law and Word.

How can you meditate on God's Word? Harvey Cox, a famous theologian gave a list of questions we can ask ourselves as we read in order to help us: What is this passage saying about God? What is it saying about Jesus? What is it saying about me? What is it saying about how I should live?

All of these descriptions of the blessed man lead to this picture: "He is like a tree planted by streams of living water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." The image is one of flourishing life. Those who are blessed are like a well-watered tree. They bear regular fruit. They have leaves that are green and fresh. Whatever they do prospers.

If we could picture in our minds an orchard that is loaded with fruit; apples, peaches, cherries, or pears, that is what those who are blessed are like. They bear fruit for God. It is the Spirit's fruit. They bear love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Do you know someone like that? Isn't their life are attractive?

We must be clear. Psalm 1 is not a recipe to a recession proof retirement package or a cancer and cholesterol free life. The prosperity described in Psalm 1 is not a health and wealth gospel. Believers can expect hardship. God promised He would be there with us through anything, but he never promised He would spare us from anything. We only have to read the rest of the Psalms to know that Christians suffer. Take Psalm 3:1 as an example. "O Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!"

There is trouble in the Christian life but the Psalms also point out that there are also deep blessings and prosperity. Psalm 23, for instance, promises that when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we don't have to fear because the Lord is with us. When the Lord is our shepherd, God promises that we will lack nothing. The law of the Lord makes us wise. There is the blessing of unity with brothers and sisters in Christ. Those blessings are the kind of prosperity described in Psalm 1.

Wouldn't you like to have a life like this? Isn't this how you'd like your life to be defined?

There is a second way of life described in this Psalm 1 and it's completely opposite from the first. If the first path in living is a way of life and blessing for those who delight in God's Word and walk with Him, this second path is a way of wicked living. The gap between the third and fourth verses of the Psalm describes the contrast between these two ways of life. Verses 3 and 4 say that whatever the blessed man does prospers. But, "not so the wicked." It's an abrupt and blunt statement, isn't it? There's nothing nice about it. It's definitive and straightforward. Those who follow the path of the wicked will not prosper.

While those who walk in God's way are like a fresh and luscious tree, the wicked are like chaff. Chaff is the leftover part of the grain. It's the stalk, the skin of the kernel. It's all the stuff that you don't eat but instead just throw away.

To fully understand the symbolism here you need a little context of how people separated the grain from the chaff. In biblical times people did this by taking a basket of unprocessed grain and would throw it into the air. Because the grain is heavier than the chaff it falls to the floor, but the chaff would be carried away in the wind. This better illustrates the warning that God gives us in regards to not following His way. This Psalm is exposing the lives of the wicked as destructive, as temporary.

Jesus taught in Matthew 13 that judgment day is like a harvest. The chaff will be blown away by the wind. The wicked will be dismissed. Jesus will say, "Depart from me, I never knew you." They will have no place in the assembly of God's saved people.

The chaff will be blown away by the wind.

Finally, all of this leads us to see that there is a parting of the ways. A fork in the road. This Psalm teaches us that there is an ultimate distinction in

life. Much like the movie I described to you, much like the game in the movie, and much like those “create your own adventure books, there are only two ways to live. There are not three ways. There’s not a fourth way. We either are living on one path or the other. The summary statement of the entire psalm spells this out. “For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

That’s all there is. There’s a finality in that statement, isn’t there? These are the two ends of life. There’s no “but” at the end of the verse. The Psalm doesn’t end saying, “The way of the wicked will perish, but...” The Psalm ends with a period, not a comma. This verse is written like the final chapter of a book. This is where these two paths in life will end up. It is left very black and white. You are either over here or you are over there. You either did or you did not. You either were or you were not.

The important question that this psalm asks is, which path will we walk on? It’s a picture that Jesus picked up in the gospels. He taught in Matthew 7, during the Sermon on the Mount, that there are only two kinds of builders in life and only two kinds of trees bearing fruit; either good builders or bad builders, either good trees or bad trees. But He also taught that there are only two gates and two ways to live in life.

He said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matthew 6:13,14) Jesus is asking just as this psalm asks, which path will we choose?

Think about how this Psalm speaks to so many different kinds of people. Perhaps they’re hearing this message and they are not yet a Christian. Perhaps they hear God tugging at their heart and challenging them to stop walking on a path that is distant from God. Perhaps they feel God drawing them toward this more fruitful and abundant life that comes from running from sin and delighting in what God says. Perhaps they’re like so many who want to believe but just don’t. So How can they have this life? The answer is to trust Jesus. We all need a Savior who can save us from ourselves and set us free to respond with obedience to God. Jesus is that savior. Jesus is our only savior.

Believe it or not but I think this is even more of a challenge for those who already know God. Which path will you walk on? Will you walk closely to God, in fellowship with Him, according to His Word or will you choose the

path of sin? This is not a one-time choice. It is a daily, hourly, even minute by minute decision. We have to repeatedly say “no” to sin. Maybe even as you’ve listened to this sermon, there are thoughts, looks, or words you’ve been tempted to engage in or express that you know are wrong. Jesus by his Word is calling us to live for God and not for sin or ourselves.

Let us make sure we’re clear. This is not a call to find blessing on your own. Jesus set the choice of the two ways in the context of the gospel. Jesus is the way. He is the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount, who has given us a law to live by as members of His kingdom. The choice of two paths that Psalm 1 sets before us is also given in the context of the gospel. This Psalm begins the Psalter. This is a covenantal book. This is a book not by which we become the people of God through obedience, but this is a book written for people who already are the people of God.

Besides, which of us always avoids the counsel of the wicked? Which of us fully delights in the law of the Lord and keeps that law? Which of us meditates on God’s law and does so day and night? We don’t do these things. We can’t do these things. Even if we do it is only for a little bit. We need a Savior who can and did. That Savior is Jesus. We are blessed only for one reason and that is because Jesus lived the life we could never live and he paid sin’s price on the cross, a price we could never pay.

Jesus is the righteous man of Psalm 1. He never walked, stood, or sat with sinners. Oh okay yes, He sat and ate with them but He never compromised or sold out to their sin. His delight was always in God’s law. Obedience to the Father was His highest priority and He never failed. And He prospered. He grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but He made Himself nothing and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:6-9). Jesus was lifted high as He submitted Himself to the Father.

How can you be the blessed man or woman of Psalm 1? By relying and trusting in Jesus. Let Him be your righteousness. Make Him your hope. May He be your joy and delight. May your response to God’s saving power in Jesus be that you do not walk in the ways of the wicked but instead delight in God’s law.

Amen.

Trey Fulkerson  
Eastminster Presbyterian Church  
Evansville, IN