

Text: Psalm 1:1-6 (Pew Bible, pg.532)

Title: “Faith Sings ... In Search of Happiness”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to Psalm 1 (Pew Bible, pg.532). I’m starting a new series of messages today that will immerse us in the Book of Psalms for the next several weeks. I’ve entitled the series, “Faith Songs.” That’s what each of the 150 chapters of Psalms are ... Faith Songs. The Psalms were originally a collection of songs to be sung. You’ll even find some musical notations peppered throughout the book.

The book of Psalms was the hymnbook, if you will, of the Jewish worship in the Temple. Later it became the hymnbook of the early church, since most of the first followers of Jesus came from a Jewish background. There are more quotations of the Psalms in the NT than of any other OT book. So as we study Psalms, we’ll be taken back thousands of years to see how believers did what you and I are doing today ... worshipping.

We’ll get a glimpse of what they sang ... but also how they sang it, often with great emotion. The writers of the Psalms went to great lengths to make us feel the way they felt as they thought about God and their relationship with Him in the good times and the bad times. So they are ... Faith Songs.

Read Psalm 1:1-6.

So I don’t load you up with too much introductory material at once, I’ll give it to you a little at a time over the next few weeks.

You’ll recall that John Lee prepared a booklet for us that introduces us to the Psalms. He’s finishing up his doctorate focusing on the Psalms, so he has and will be a great resource to us.

I’m starting with the first psalm, but I’ll not be preaching on every psalm, nor will I preach on psalms in the order of their appearance in your Bible. The reason is that the psalms are not put together in chronological order. Scholars are not certain as to how to outline the psalms. We do know that there are five books of the psalms. If you look at Psalm 1 you see that it says, “Book I.” Book II of the Psalms begins with Psalm 42.

ILLUSTRATION – Reading psalms is a bit like going to iTunes. Songs of all kinds are found there. There’s not just one kind of psalm, just like there’s not just one type of music.

Now scholars are not in agreement as to exactly how many different types there are. But we’ll see that there are wisdom psalms, thanksgiving psalms, praise psalms, lament psalms (“the blues”), messianic psalms (point us to Jesus, and pilgrimage psalms (sung by God’s people on their way to church).

Well, let’s get into the first psalm ... “Faith Sings ... In Search of Happiness.”

Psalm 1:1 - 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.

The psalm begins with an outburst: “Blessed is the man ...” or “How incredibly happy is the man (or woman)...” So the psalmist, possibly David, has happiness on his mind.

ILLUSTRATION – The Declaration of Independence states mankind has three inalienable rights ... “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” We have to wonder why in a nation where we have every freedom to pursue happiness, why are there so many unhappy people ... why is happiness so elusive to us? Part of the problem is that we don’t really know what happiness is.

ILLUSTRATION - We think it’s like the line in the song from the show Oklahoma: “I’ve got a wonderful feeling; everything’s going my way.” And there are times in our lives when everything doesn’t go our way, and we aren’t happy.

And I know we sometimes say that God isn’t interested in our happiness, only our holiness. Well that’s not entirely true. Psalm 1:1 talks about the “blessed” person ... the incredibly happy person. The problem is that most people don’t define happiness the way God does. And this psalm teaches us that as we search for happiness we won’t find it by leaving God out of the picture.

Three factors that determine your destiny. Ultimately your happiness (as God defines it) will depend on these three factors:

1. The COUNSEL you take

Psalm 1:1 - Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked...

Note: Now there’s something else you need to know as we study the Psalms. Each psalm comes in the form of Hebrew poetry, which isn’t like English poetry. Some of you are great fans and students of poetry. I have to confess I’m not. But I learned enough about it to know that English poetry emphasizes rhyme and meter or rhythm:

ILLUSTRATION – Since tomorrow is Valentine’s Day, here’s an example: “Roses are red; violets are blue. Sugar is sweet; and so are you.” So you have the rhyming and rhythm.

Hebrew poetry is different. It relies on different tools for its impact. And here we get a taste of it. With three parallel expressions the psalmist described the life of incredibly happy man or women. Notice in v.1 there is the image of walking, then standing, then sitting. And all this is done under the influence of three kinds of people the wicked, the sinners, and then the mockers. And I will show you that these are three increasingly evil influences in our lives.

Now it says we are not blessed if we “walk in the counsel of the wicked.” The “wicked” spoken of here are simply ungodly people or influences. They’re not the worst influences you can imagine. These are people who just leave God out of their life altogether.

ILLUSTRATION – So where do you turn for counsel and direction in your life? Is it a marriage counselor who isn't going to give you counsel according to God's Word. Is it a friend who isn't going to pray with you about a decision? They'll tell you to do what makes you happy. You'll not find happiness without godly counsel.

The next factor is this:

2. The CHOICES you make

Psalm 1:1 - Blessed is the man who does not ... stand in the way of sinners

Notice the movement. This person is walking, and then they stop and stand. The image that comes to my mind is of a person standing at a fork in the path and wondering which path to take, which choice to make. The psalmist uses the word "way." And the wrong way is the "way of sinners." And this way is not just someone who leaves God out of the picture of their life. This is a person who actually chooses a way to live that doesn't conform to the laws of God.

So the psalm tells us that we should not take counsel from ungodly influences and we should not make choices following the example of sinful influences.

There's a fair chance that some of you right now have been *walking* in the counsel of ungodly influences telling you what they think will make you happy. And you have come to *stand* at a crossroads and there are influences around you telling you to make a choice that they say will make you happy ... but it won't. It'll be a disaster. Why? Because it is the way of sinners.

Now there's a third factor.

3. The COMPANY you keep

Psalm 1:1 - Blessed is the man who does not ... sit in the seat of mockers.

Remember the progression walking, standing, then sitting. The picture here shows us relationships. There's a gathering in the picture here. People sitting together ... and there you are among them in the "seat of mockers."

"Mockers" take evil to the highest level. The "wicked" simply leave God out of the picture of their life. The "sinners" are people who have put that into their behavior, making choices that are sinful. But "mockers" are people who hate God. It's not just that they ignore him, or make their choices apart from Him. They despise and mock God.

And to "sit in the seat" of such people means to completely identify with them in their proud, arrogant godlessness.

Show me your very closest relationships, and I'll show you your future ... your destiny.

Happiness isn't found in the life described here. There's a progression ... spiral downward ... a slow fade. Listening to the *wrong voices* (to people who are not committed to God, entertainment that leaves God out of the picture), then making the *wrong choices* based on those ungodly voices. Then you find yourself sitting, staying and dwelling in a life with people who aren't just sinful, they have become God-haters.

So this is where happiness is *not* found. This is not the way of a blessed person, an extraordinarily happy person. So where is this way found?

Psalm 1:2 - But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Now we've been talking about people who ignore, then violate and then ultimately hate the "law of the Lord." But the incredibly happy person delights in what others despise.

The "law of the Lord" is the record of God's requirements for us. It means the teaching, the instruction and the direction of the Lord. It reveals the heart of God. It's the Word of God.

ILLUSTRATION – "The law of the Lord" is the rules of the game. Games are only really fun when you play by the rules. Example: One game that many of you play today is "Words with Friends." It's an online version of Scrabble where you can be in a game with several people at the same time. Now the game really has no meaning if there are no rules. Now in word games, someone can say "xyz" is a word, but the standard is the dictionary. The game has no meaning if there is no standard.

And "the law of the Lord" is the standard that gives meaning to our lives.

Now the psalmist describes two ways to connect with God's Word, and to have it influence your life ... to become the primary counsel of your life:

DELIGHT = When you delight in something it makes your face light up.

ILLUSTRATION – Over Christmas our family took a trip to Disney World. Now I can take or leave the rides. I got the most just watching the delight in the faces of my grandkids as they saw Buzz Light Year or an insane roller coaster ride. They were delighted. Are we that way about the Word of God ... the laws of God? Does your face light up when you come before God in His Word?

MEDITATE - To "meditate" means to think about it ... to think *deeply* about it. The word was used to describe the growling of a lion over its prey, or of a dog chewing on a bone. When OT believers meditated on God's Word they recited it aloud and reflected on its meaning.

This shows us the importance of memorizing Scripture, then thinking deeply about it as we go over and over it.

And this becomes the counsel we take that leads to our choices we make, that leads to the company we keep.

Now here's the result.

Psalm 1:3 - He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Now I mentioned earlier that psalms extensively use images. And here is one of them. The author compares the godly individual to a tree that has a rich water supply (planted by flowing streams), develops a strong root system, and is filled with leaves and fruit.

TREE - "Planted" means "transplanted."

WATER - "Rivers of water" refers to manmade irrigation ditches. Streams in Bible lands would regularly dry up, but the irrigation canals that came off the great rivers never did. So there's a constant source of nourishment.

FRUIT – So the picture is of a tree carefully transplanted beside an irrigation ditch where it is tended and cared for by a gardener so that it bears fruit. "Fruit" is the external evidence of an internal life. Fruit can be character (fruit of the Spirit), fruit can be good deeds (by their fruit you know them), fruit can be people whose lives are shaped by our life (reproduction).

LEAVES – I think of leaves as one's countenance.

PROSPERITY - "Whatever he does prospers." = We need to talk about this statement. If we don't understand it properly we'll be sucked into the heresy of what is known today as the "prosperity Gospel." Or we will be disappointed when everything doesn't go our way ... and we aren't healthy and wealthy. What then? Did we miss God? Did we sin?

EXAMPLE: The story of Joseph in the OT is a great example of this. Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, was sold into slavery by his brothers. But as a slave Joseph honored God, and God prospered him. Joseph wasn't set free immediately. His life was not free of trouble. He didn't become wealthy overnight. But he changed the course of nation and influenced the course of history.

Psalm 1:4 - Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

"Not so!" Here's another image ... and a contrast. So this psalm presents two contrasting ways of life and the two contrasting destinies that go along with them.

The godly are happy because they are like a fruitful, beautiful tree. The wicked are the opposite, they are like chaff.

Now this takes us back to the farming techniques of Bible times. The farmer would place the wheat he had harvested on a stone threshing floor. Then he would drive his ox cart around it so that the wheels of the cart and the hooves of the oxen would crush the grain, separating the grain from the husks. Then He would then use a kind of pitch fork to pitch the grain and the

chaff in the air. The grain would fall to the floor to be preserved and the chaff would be caught by the wind and blown away.

CONCLUSION

And that's the ultimate destiny of people of people who take the wrong counsel, who make the wrong choices and who keep the wrong company.

The Bible tells us that a day of separation and judgment is coming. And the separation will run along these lines. There's a group of people who are Christ-followers ... who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. And there's a group of those who haven't done that, but instead have built their lives leaving Jesus Christ out of the picture. Which group are you in?

Psalm 1:5 - Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

Now there's one thing about the assembly of the righteous, the people of God. They get together for a meal. And that meal is called the Lord's Supper. It's one way that we identify who we are as the "assembly of the righteous."

LORD'S SUPPER