

Place: Lurgan Baptist 21:8:2005

Reading: Psalm 1

THE SECRET OF TRUE HAPPINESS

A young man was learning to be a paratrooper. Before his first jump he was given the following instructions.

1. *Jump when you are told.* 2. *Count to ten and pull the ripcord.* 3. *In the unlikely event that your chute does not open pull the emergency ripcord.* 4. *When you get down, a truck will be there to take you back to the airfield.* The young soldier memorised these instructions and climbed aboard the plane. The plane climbed to an altitude of ten thousand feet and the paratroopers began to jump. When the young soldier was told to jump he jumped. He then counted to ten, and pulled the ripcord. Nothing happened. His chute failed to open. So he pulled the emergency ripcord. Still nothing happened. No parachute. “*Oh, great,*” he thought “*and I suppose the truck won't be there when I get down either.*” My

have you ever felt like that ? Have you ever experienced failures and disappointments to the point that you didn't expect anything to go right for you ? Sometimes the whole world seems to be against us.

But then there are some people who seem to breeze through life. They always land on their feet and success always seems to come their way, almost to the point of being unfair. *What does it take to be a person who always lands on their feet ? What is the secret of true prosperity and happiness ?* Well, I believe that

(Psalm 1) gives us an understanding of the good and godly life that differs enormously from the way these things are usually understood in western society today. Did you notice how the psalm begins ? “*Blessed is the man,*” Now when it speaks of man its not thinking in terms of gender. In the Hebrew, man means mankind, humankind. Scholars tell us that in the Hebrew language the word “*blessed,*” is known as an intensive plural. You could translate it, “*O, the blessednesses ! O, the happinesses ! O, the joys !*” “*Oh, the happinesses of the man,*” Or “*happy, happy is the man.*” It is a plural blessing. Why does God make it in the plural ? Well, the Lord does not dole out His blessings one at a time. He pours them out in the plural.

When I was young my parents required me to take music lessons. I have forgotten almost everything my music teacher taught me, but one thing I do remember is where to find “*middle C.*” You see, everything flows up and down from that mysterious middle C. Though I never did learn why the musical alphabet doesn't start with

“*A,*” I did learn that middle C is the starting point, the dividing line as it were, between treble and bass. But God doesn't start the music of heaven with middle C. God doesn't start the hymnbook of the Hebrews with middle C. The Lord finds a high note and begins there. For this book of Psalms begins with the word “*blessed.*” Now I want to talk to you this about “*The Secret of True Blessedness,*” and I want you to notice first of all,

(1) THE BLESSED PERSON NEGATIVELY

Do you see how the psalm begins, “ *happy, happy is the man*,” (1:1) Modern psychology tells us to emphasize the positive, God begins by emphasizing the negative. *The happy, happy person is marked by the things he does not do, the places to which he does not go, by the books he does not read, by the films he does not watch, by the company he does not keep.* Is that not a strange way to begin ? God begins this book not with the power of positive thinking, but with the power of negative thinking. Do you recall the ten commandments ? Several times in them God says, “ *Thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not.*” So God begins describing the life that prospers by giving us some negatives. If you want to be a happy person, if you want to know God’s blessing then there are some things you don’t do. What are they ? Well, did you notice that the blessed man is careful as to,

(a) THE COUNSEL THAT HE RECEIVES:

“ *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.*” (1:1) That is, he will not expose himself to the attitudes and ideas of “ *the ungodly.*” The word “ *ungodly,*” is a general term in Hebrew denoting those who have no place for God in their lives. It emanates from a root meaning “ *unrest.*” The ungodly person has a profound restlessness in his soul. Deeply disturbed he frantically scrambles for peace and satisfaction. But the person “ *in Christ,*” does not seek advice from people “ *without Christ.*” Imagine how many Christians allow unhappy people to tell them how to be happy. My don’t let a loser tell you how to win ! Here is a man

whose footsteps are guided by the Word and not by the whims of men. Do you know how some folks start their day ? By reading their horoscope, that’s the counsel they get ! Or listening to some psychic on television or by tuning into some “ *talk show.*” My where do you get your advice ? What do you listen to ? Where do you get your opinions ? How are your values and morals shaped ? A poll taken some years ago in the USA revealed that young people were influenced more by their peers than their parents !

My where do you get your advice from ? You see, the Devil wants to get you listening to the wrong people.

Some folk have marriage problems and they go to the office and this old hussy at the job says, “ *You just sit down with me. I’ve been married three times. I know all about this marriage business. Let me tell you how it works.*” Will you be careful where you get your counsel ? (a)

(b) THE COMPANY THAT HE KEEPS:

“ *Nor standeth in the way of sinners,*” (1:1) The word “ *sinners,*” means habitual rebels towards God. Now we should make friends of sinners for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ made friends with all kinds of people, but He do so in order to lead them to a higher, holier way of life. Indeed they called Him “ *a friend of publicans and sinners.*” But this verse teaches us that we are not to stand in the way of sinners, we are not to participate in their sinful activities. You see, the man who is on the

road to prosperity is very careful in the company that he keeps. My I know its old and well worn, but its true, “ *birds of a feather flock together.*” The Word of God says, “ *evil companions corrupt good manners.*”

(1 Cor 15:33) Abraham stood in the way of sinners when he went down to Egypt to escape the famine in Canaan, where he told Pharaoh that Sarah was his sister, and lost his testimony. Lot stood in the way of sinners when he listened to the King of Sodom instead of the King of Salem, went back to Sodom and lost his family.

My more than one child of God has got away from the Lord because they started running with the wrong crowd. What about you ? Young folk, are you careful in the company that you keep ? It was said that some years ago musicians noted that the errand boys in a certain part of London all whistled out of tune as they went about their daily work. Someone suggested that it was because the bells of Westminster were slightly out of tune, You see what had happened was that the boys had unconsciously copied their pitch. Are you copying the people with whom you are associating ? Are you imbibing thoughts from the book you’re reading ? What about the programmes you’re watching that are filled with bad language, violence and sex outside of marriage ? Do you want to know the blessing of God ? Well, you’ll be careful about (a) (b) and,

(c) THE CONCEPTS THAT HE HOLDS:

“ *Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful,*” (1:1) Do you see the progression here ? **Walking, Standing, Sitting !**

Do you see how it leads downward ? You start getting your advice in the wrong places, and then you start running along with the wrong crowd. The next thing you know you are in the company of those who make fun of the things of the Lord. The word “ *scornful,*” is bloodcurdling because it speaks of individuals who laugh at, ridicule and sneer at God. What the Psalmist called the “ *seat,*” referred to what we would call the “ *chair,*” of the scornful. We speak for instance of the professors chair, but the Hebrews would speak of “ *their seat.*” (Matt 23:2) Do you see what the blessed man avoids ? He avoids the seat of the scornful, he avoids the classroom of the atheist and humanist who delight to shred the faith of the unlearned. My our secular colleges are full of them today and even some so called Bible Colleges are not free from them. Many a young man went to prepare for the ministry, but chose the wrong school and soon found himself sitting with the scornful. He was taught that the Bible was not divinely inspired. He was taught to deny the deity of Christ, the miracles, the Lord’s atoning death, the bodily resurrection, to repudiate the blessed hope of Christ’s coming. He went in full of zeal, he left with his boyhood faith and his Bible torn to shreds. He had been sitting in the seat of the scornful ! Now do you see the man God blesses ? ***He is Separated from the World !*** (1)

(2) THE BLESSED PERSON POSITIVELY:

Look at (1:2) if you will ! “ *But his delight night,*” Throughout the Bible, “ *the law,*” refers not only to the ten commandments and the first five books of the Bible,

the Pentateuch, but in the Jewish mind had reference to the written Scriptures. Today, we would say the Bible, the Word of God. Has it ever dawned on you, that when you open up the Word of God you are listening to the very words of God ? That God has given us His words, His directions, His teaching right here in the pages of the Bible ! My ***the Bible does not contain the Word of God, the Bible is the Word of God.*** And a true Christian is a Bible Christian. If you love the Saviour, you'll love the Word. "*His delight is in the law of the Lord.*" I love to hear this Word preached. I love to hear it taught. I love to read it in my own personal devotional times. Do you have a devotion time ? Do you have a time when you open the Word and let God speak to you ? This is where you need to get your advice, your counsel ! You see, God is the authority on the Church, on Marriage, on the State, on the Home ! "*His delight is in the law of the Lord.*" Do you see here,

(a) HIS AFFECTION FOR THE WORD:

"*His delight is in the law of the Lord,*" to him meditation on the Word was no irksome duty or unwelcome fetter but his joy and delight. Archibald Naismith, for over forty years a Christian teacher in India, tells us that when his family returned to Great Britain on holiday, one of his sons a lad about six or seven years of age, attended school in that country for the first time. One day the lad came home and reported that he had to write a short essay on the subject, "***My Greatest Treasure.***" His parents wondered which of his treasured possessions he would choose to write about. When the boy finally showed his parents his completed

composition, they were thrilled to find that his first sentence was "***My greatest treasure is my Holy Bible.***" Is God's Word your greatest treasure ? Can you say with the psalmist, "*Oh, how I love Thy law ! It is my meditation all the day.*" (119:97)

George Barna found in a survey that half of Americans do not read the Bible. The majority of professing Christians read the Bible only once or twice a week or not at all. His survey found that 18% of all professing Christians read the Bible every day, another 18% read the Bible between three and six days a week. Another 37% read it only once or twice and 23% said they did not read the Bible at all. Do you love God's Word ?

(b) HIS ASSIMILATION OF THE WORD:

"*In His law doth he meditate day and night.*" By "*meditation,*" the Bible does not mean so called transcendental meditation, which is nothing but a trap for the unwary, Hinduism masquerading as a science. My beware of any philosophy which teaches how to disengage the mind from deliberate and normal thought processes so it can be free to receive impressions from elsewhere. That kind of thing leads to demonic suggestion. No, the meditation that the Psalmist advocates deliberately engages the mind with the truths of God's Word ! This word "*meditate,*" is an interesting word. It means "*to moan,*" the word could be translated

"*hum.*" Did you ever see those orthodox Jews at the wailing wall in Jerusalem ? Did you ever hear them ? Well, you can't understand a word they are saying. They

are sort of talking to themselves, moaning and humming repeating the Torah, the Law. Now that is the kind of description we have here ! The blessed man is marked by hiding God's Word in his heart, uttering that Word to himself and to others. Do you know how a cow chews the cud ? That old cow never seems to be in a hurry, but chews the cud again and again, savouring it. Its all part of the process of rumination. Now meditation is spiritual rumination, bringing the Word up and chewing it and tasting it ! My do you know what it is to assimilate the Word ?

(c) HIS ATTENTION TO THE WORD:

“ And in his law doth he meditate day and night,” he takes a text and carries it with him all day long, and in the night watches when sleep forsakes his eyelids, he muses on the Word of God. *In the day of his prosperity he sings Psalms out of the Word of God, and in the night of his affliction he comforts himself with the Promises of this Word !* Tell me, as a believer how do you relate to this book ? Do you come into God's presence, with an open Bible in your hand and say, *“ Speak, Lord Thy servant heareth ?”* Do you read the Word in a methodical, meaningful, meditating way seeking to understand and appropriate its truths ? Do you ask the following questions, Is there any sin here for me to avoid ? Is there any promise here for me to claim ? Is there a victory to gain ? Is there any blessing to enjoy ? Is there any truth I have never seen before about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, about man, about sin ? What is the main thing I can learn here ? My that's

meditating on the Law day and night ! That's the blessed man negatively, positively.

(3) THE BLESSED PERSON SUBSEQUENTLY

You see, it follows from what he does not do and what he does do, that *“ he shall be like a tree prosper.”* In the Bible water for washing is a picture of the Word of God. (119:9) Water for drinking is a picture of the Spirit of God. (Jn 7:37) Now our meditation in the Scripture releases the river of God's Spirit so that our lives are refreshed and revitalized. Indeed the Psalmist tells us that there are certain things that mark the life of the man who is situated by the water. For example did you notice,

(a) HIS PERMANENCE:

“ And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,” (1:3) Unlike the grass, which is mowed down in successive harvests, a tree sends its roots down deep into the soil. It has a deep, hidden life. Its rooted and grounded securely in the earth. Does that not speak of strength, stability, steadfastness ? A man who used to hand out gospel tracts quit because he had never seen anyone come to Christ through his ministry. Two years later he happened to pass that same familiar corner and there was a person handing our tracts. He walked over to the stranger and struck up a conversation. He learned that a little more than two years earlier the man had become a Christian after reading a tract he had received at the corner. *“ Many a time I've come back here to find the man to thank him,”* said the stranger *“ but he never*

came back. So I decided he must have died and gone to his reward. That's why I have taken his place." My when you are doing the work of the Lord its always too soon to quit ! Are you like a tree planted ? Steadfast, and unwavering ! Can you see here,

(b) HIS PRODUCTIVITY:

“ *That bringeth it forth his fruit in his season,*” (1:3) His branches run over the wall and he is a blessing to everyone ! Fruit is what God does through your life. Fruit is the blessing that God brings through your life. Do you recall that in (John Ch 15) *the Lord Jesus talked about fruit, He talked about more fruit, He talked about much fruit, He talked about fruit that remains.* How do you bear fruit in the Christian life ? The Saviour said, the key is “ *abide in Me.*” (Jn 15:3) The branch has to abide in the vine, and the tree is planted by the rivers of water. Its drawing nourishment, then it produces fruit. My Are you a productive Christian ? Is the fruit of the Holy Spirit evident in your life ? (Gal 5:22) Are you bringing forth fruit in terms of souls ? (Rom 1:13) Is there something evergreen about your life ? We don't need any withered saints around we need saints who are perpetually alive for the Saviour ! My here is the consequence of what the blessed man does not do, and what he does do. Can you see (a) (b)

(c) HIS PROSPERITY:

“ *And whatsoever prosper,*” that word literally means “ *to advance.*” Prosper ! Have you just got married, just starting off in life, do you want to prosper

? Young people with college and university ahead of you, do you want to prosper, do you want to be a success ? Business man, you've just got your own business going and established, do you want to prosper ? What does it mean to prosper ? Is it to make a lot of money ? Is it to have a lot of material things ? Is that what prosperity is all about ? I think the Psalmist here is talking about spiritual prosperity. My are you rich spiritually ? Is your soul rich in faith, in hope, in love ? Do you remember King Uzziah ? “ *As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.*” (2 Chron 26:5) My I promise you that as long as you seek the Lord you will prosper !

The Secret of True Happiness ! Have you discovered it ? *Are you a Christian who is Separated from the World, Saturated with the Word, and Situated by the Waters ?* Ultimately this Psalm speaks of that Blessed Man, even our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, the Life. (Jn 14:6) Do you know Him ? Is He your Saviour ? In Him have you discovered ***The Secret of True Happiness ?***