

The Path to Blessing

Psalm 1

Introduction

‘The Prayer of Jabez’ was a book that took the Christian world by storm back in 2000 – based on an OT prayer by the figure of Jabez. The book went on to be the non-fiction bestseller for the year - - and ultimately sold over 9 million copies - - - not to mention study guides / coffee cups / calendars / any other Christian paraphernalia

The prayer – is recorded in I Chronicles 4

I Chronicles 4:10 - 'Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldst keep me from harm, that it may not pain me! And God granted him what he requested.'

It's a simple prayer – asking for God's blessing

The author of the book – encouraged Christians to pray the prayer of Jabez - - - and watch God bless

The publisher's promotional blurb reads this way

Dr. Bruce Wilkinson . . . takes readers to 1 Chronicles 4:10 to discover how they can release God's miraculous power and experience the blessings God longs to give each of us . . . Readers who commit to offering the same prayer on a regular basis will find themselves extravagantly blessed by God, and agents of His miraculous power, in everyday life.

The book has been critiqued by some evangelicals for preaching a kind of soft prosperity gospel – pray this prayer and God will bless you materially / make all your dreams come true / etc.

We certainly don't find the idea in Scripture that mindlessly repeating someone else's prayer over and over will result in blessing or draw us nearer unto God

Whatever one thinks of the Jabez book - - - it does remind us of a basic yearning of the individual to want to be blessed

You want to be blessed today – I do too! / nobody gets up in the morning and thinks - - - ‘boy – I hope God curses me today!’

As we turn to Psalm 1 – this morning - - - we find ‘blessing’ to be the theme of the very first Psalm - - - perhaps written by David - - - but - - - no name ascribed to this Psalm

Psalm 1:1 - 'How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.'

Martin Luther reminds us that – there is nothing wrong with wanting to be blessed

Martin Luther: 'The search for personal blessedness is common to all men. There is no one who does not desire to fare well or hate to fare badly. And yet, all men, whoever they are, have strayed from the knowledge of true blessedness.'

A survey of biblical passages quickly reminds us that 'blessedness' - - - in God's economy does not equate to health and wealth for every Christian – no matter what prayer they pray

The blessings of God have to do with the richness of fellowship with God / the blessings of salvation / forgiveness of sin / a cleansed conscience / inner peace / eternal blessings

The blessed man is quite simply – the man of faith - - - who trusts God and appropriates His Word to His Life in authentic belief

Psalm 1 is seen as a fitting introduction to the Psalms

This Psalm presents us with a number of contrasts:

- Two kinds of people: righteous / wicked
- Two roads: way of the righteous / way of the wicked
- Two kinds of foliage: [a strongly rooted tree / a rootless tumble weed – chaff
- Two kinds of counsel: wisdom of God / counsel of the wicked
- Two outcomes: blessing / perishing

We want to be blessed - - - what is the path of blessing we ask

The Psalmist says – 'pull up a chair and let me tell you'

I. The Blessed Man - v. 1

This is a psalm about blessedness

The Hebrew word – Asher = blessedness / happiness

Genesis 30 – when Jacob's wives were having a baby making contest – that resulted in the twelve tribes -- - Leah gave her maid Zilpha unto Jacob - - and she gave birth to the 8th boy - - - whom Leah named Asher - - - Leah said: 'Happy am I!'

We get an idea of the meaning of the word [Asher] by some of the usages of blessed in the Bible

Psalm 32:1 - 'How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!'

You are blessed – if your sins are forgiven!

Jesus gave a whole series of beatitudes – which began with blessed

Matthew 5:6 - 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.'

Blessed are the peacemakers

Blessed are the merciful

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness – [great is their reward in heaven]

James 1:12 - 'Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.'

You might be blessed – even though persecuted or undergoing great trials

Daniel was blessed – even in a lion's den / Stephen was blessed – even while being stoned to death

We see that the overall direction of Scripture – on the idea of blessed - - - points to aspects of character / relationship with God - - - and of ultimate destinies

Psalm 1 fits perfectly within that stream

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

Why? Because the way of the wicked will perish – v. 6

What defines the blessed man?

He does not walk in the counsel of the wicked

There is a progression the Psalmist uses here - - - of involvement in sin – walking / standing / sitting

Many sins begin small – and progress onward to larger patterns and vices

The alcoholic somewhere started with one drink

Pornography addiction – may have begun with a small click of the mouse - - - grows into a factory of defilement

C. S. Lewis: "Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts... Your affectionate uncle, Screwtape."

Just get on the path of sin - - - and keep right on going / you will find yourself in hell soon enough

Point: sin is not the way to blessedness – it never has been – never will be

John Stott: 'The godly do not model their conduct on the advice of bad people.'

God's Word says this is wrong / avoid it / repent of it / etc.

Ungodly counsel says – 'it's ok – everybody's doing it / we know better than Paul / etc.'

Jesus once said

Matthew 5:8 - 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'

Pastor John Piper once received a question from a guy – the man's wife had just suffered a miscarriage – and the husband wondered if his sin caused the miscarriage - - - his sin being looking at pornography

Many people wonder at times - - - did this trial or bad thing happen to me in connection with some sin I committed? [could a miscarriage be God's discipline]

Answer: it could be - - - but We don't really know – apart from divine revelation

The counsel of God is the same regardless - - get rid of your sin / seek His forgiveness - - - and walk with Jesus

The truths we know are that God does discipline for sin / We have every reason to expect His discipline if we know the Lord – and are walking in open defiance of His Word - - - walking in the counsel of the wicked

It is not easy – to resist the counsel of the ungodly / the world - - - or to not stand in their path – or sit in their seat

Christopher Ash: 'From the school playground to the senior care home, we instinctively want to say the same things as the wicked, to laugh at the same jokes as the wicked, to share the same values of the wicked, to take the same life decisions as the wicked. Whatever your age, stage of life, ethnicity or

culture, this will be an insidious temptation for you. It will never be easy to march out of step with an insistent world.'

But - - - Sin leads only to ruin / to guilt / to folly / to brokenness / to loss / not blessedness!

Just this last week – I was reminded of this - - - a well-known pastor / professor at the Master's seminary - - spoke at every Shepherd's conference - - - has written thirty books - - - he confessed to committing adultery

Virtually every position he held in ministry has been taken away

Anyone can stumble - - - if we give in to carelessness - - - and he is still a Christian going to heaven

The point: sin does not lead to blessing - - - it leads to pain / loss / grief / etc.

Sin doesn't lead to blessing

The Proverbs speak of the adulterer

Proverbs 6:32-33 - 'The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it. Wounds and disgrace he will find, and his reproach will not be blotted out.'

That's not a path of blessing

Sometimes the wicked look like they are having a pretty good time in this world - - - they are making money / they are throwing the parties / they are living loosely with few morals – sometimes it looks like there aren't a lot of consequences

Galatians 6:7 - 'Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.'

The blessed man understands that it all begins with the counsel we listen to

II. The Way of the Blessed - vv. 2, 3

Instead of listening to the counsel of the wicked - - - the blessed man / woman listens to God

Meditating on the Law of God – Word of God - - - He looks to God for guidance as to how he ought to live in this world

The blessed position is 'delight' in God's Word

Jeremiah 15:16 - 'Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart.'

The blessed man - - - is not someone who mindlessly repeats someone else's prayer - - - but rather someone who delights in the Word of God

In our day – we have something called the social media influencer

They are people with thousands or hundreds of thousands of followers / perhaps millions - - - people watch their videos / listen to advice

It might be Mr. Beast – and his sidekick – ‘gender confusion’
It might be Taylor Swift / who wants to tell us who to vote for

Influencers influence people – or try to

Who and what we allow to influence us shapes our lives

Who / What do you follow on facebook / Instagram ? / tv shows you watch / books you read / etc.

We make choices all the time - - - we are not just passive agents in this work

When I was a teenager - - - I was influenced by Eddie Van Halen / all the drinking buddies in my circle - - - but God got a hold of my life

I remember the lights coming on spiritually - - - I came to delight in God's Word

In 1988 – I went to my last rock concert - - - Van Halen in KC

In 1993 – 5 years later - - - I started attending seminary to be a pastor

5 years later – My grandfather passed away – I inherited hundreds of Bible commentaries

I found more answers in God's Word than I ever found in rock music

Satan does not want you to read your Bible

Why? Because the word of God is living / active / sharper than any two-edged sword

When you pick up the Bible - - - you are handling something that has changed the lives of millions of people

Hebrews 4:12 - 'For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.'

The Psalmist says - - - let God's Word be the influence in your life

As we take in God's Word – we are like a tree slowly putting down roots / drinking in the water of the soil / growing quietly / steadily

Tumbleweeds – lack roots into the ground – so they just blow about in the desert

Our world is so lost - - - people don't even know what gender they are / they don't commit to relationships / they are worshipping at the altar of money / sex / power

We can be a tumble weed – ignore God's Word / ignore Jesus - - - or we can be trees rooted

Richard Phillips: 'The blessed man is a Bible man - a man of the book. By God's Word he is led in the narrow path that leads to life.'

We become defined by our delights / our loves

We either delight in God's Word / counsel – or we walk in the counsel of the wicked

We either cherish Jesus or we cherish sin

This Psalm holds up the blessed life – but not a problem free life

This tree experiences seasons of drought / trial / hardship are part of the blessed man's life

A healthy tree can stand up to many storms – it is rooted / anchored

There is a stability to the blessed man / woman- - - when days of drought come - - - He has an unyielding source of life – because his roots run deep

C.J. Mahaney -- shares the story of his sister whose husband was found to have a brain tumor.

Eventually he came home from the doctors and was placed under hospice care awaiting the inevitable. In a few months he went home to be with the Lord.

On one occasion – during his hospice care - - - a relative of Dave was visiting – a man who was not a Christian. As he watched Sharon caring for her husband and this man thought about Dave's relative youth and the children he would leave behind, anger seemed to well up within him. Anger at God'

He asked Sharon, 'Why aren't you angry?'

Her response showed the deep roots of her soul

‘Dave deserved hell for his sins, just like you and me, and yet God in His mercy forgave him because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Dave is going to heaven.’ She said. ‘How can I be angry at God for taking him to heaven?’

Those are roots that run deep . . .

The most important part of your life will be your root system because there will come a day when you need those deep roots

Luke 6:47-49 - 'Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.'

People may foolishly think they don't need God at times -- - they have never suffered much / they have plenty of money / they've never gone hungry / they've never experienced hardship

They view God as a waste of time

Why should I bother with God? / I don't need God / I am having too much fun going to these parties / making this much money / living loosely

They are like the prodigal son / walking in the counsel of the wicked - - - eventually the famine comes

I think a major famine is coming for America - - - it will be a wake-up call for sinners

Jeremiah 17:7-8 - 'Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit.'

III. The Way of the Wicked - vv. 4-6

Here the Psalmist reminds us of eternal realities

The wicked do not endure – the way of the wicked will perish

The wicked might be on the cover of Time and People – they might have a mansion in Malibu or a luxury home in Greenwich Village or a star on Hollywood Blvd

They might be amongst the most influential in the world - - - but the Psalmist reminds us of the outcome of their life

'the way of the wicked will perish'

There is no future in wickedness - - - it leads to perishing

The way of the wicked leads to ruin

The two ways part forever in the judgment

Matthew 7:13, 14 - 'Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.'

Conclusion

We enter the path of the godly – by trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior

Jesus once said:

Luke 5:32 - 'I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'

Why did He say that? / there are no righteous

Romans 3:23 - 'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.'

The blessed man is the sinner who first repents of his sin and trusts in Jesus Christ - -- as he fixes his eyes upon Jesus - - - He walks in the counsel of the godly / He stands in the path of truth / He sits in the seat of the Redeemed

Charles Spurgeon: 'Holiness is not the way to Christ; Christ is the way to holiness.'

God once spoke to Abraham – saying that in His seed – all the nations of the earth would be blessed – that seed referred to Abraham's descendant according to the flesh - - - Jesus Christ

Acts 3:25-26 - 'It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed." For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.'

That is the blessing of salvation – embracing Jesus / His death and resurrection on our behalf - - - being turned from our wicked ways – that is the way to be blessed!