

Sunday Morning talk given by Tim Coad on 20 July 2014

[Sue T:]

Tim is going to come out and speak to us but before he does that Sue is going to come out and read Psalm 1.

[Sue W:]

Psalm 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 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. 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.

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

[Tim Coad:] Thank you, Sue, and thank you, Sue.

Good morning, are you wide-awake on this rather warm day?

Right, we've been looking at the book of Thessalonians over a few weeks and, as we come to sort of summer months when we get some visitors, you are welcome this morning if you are visiting. Even if you are regular visitors and you come from time to time that's really good. But during the summer some of you go away and various things so we thought we'd do something, which sort of each week stands on its own, but there will be a link between them.

And I thought it would be good, well it was partly Martin's idea I think, occasionally I get inspired by other people who's making strange noises? Is somebody shaving at the back? We thought we'd look at some Psalms for a few weeks and I decided well, you know, start at the beginning, Psalm 1 and probably, if you saw that, if some of you started to read it during the week, if you saw the Prayer Chain e-mail, you probably thought, mm, if he's going to start at Psalm 1 does that mean 150 weeks?

Well, no, it doesn't, but if you got the Prayer Chain e-mail you will see some of the other Psalms that you could be reading. But next week we are hoping to look at Psalm 19. Not 119 — because that's a bit of a long one; but Psalm 19, which is again one of my favourites.

So Sue has read to us Psalm 1 and we are going to just look at one or two things in there this morning, hopefully to encourage us.

Security and stability seem to me to be important parts of our lives. It is good to be secure. One of the things that clients, for want of a better word, people who seek counsellors, often talk about is a lack of security. "Something is going wrong in my life. I am not sure where I stand. I am not sure where I'm going." There's a missing security. "I am not sure who loves me," maybe.

Security and stability and there can be a lot of instability in our world, can't there? There can be a lot of instability in our world when things seem to be going wrong and you're not sure where you are. It has been said that a person, an individual, has three basic needs: security, significance and self-worth. Counsellor trainers word it in different ways but those are the three sorts of key needs that we have.

Security, to know where everything is coming from, to know where we stand. Significance, to know that I'm important. Self-worth, also again just to know that I am worth something, I am valuable, I am unique, I am special. We need to know we are safe; we need to know we have purpose and meaning and we need to know we are worth something, we have value.

And that is why I like Psalm 1 because Psalm 1 seems to be a Psalm to me about security and stability. It seems to be a Psalm about those basic needs. And it seems to me to suggest a picture of a growing, strong person. A person who knows where they are going, a person who has security, a person who has strength and a person who knows what they are up to and knows where they are going. And it also suggests to me that God wants us to be secure and God wants us to be happy.

This week I have spoken to at least two people, and I am not talking about people near here, I am talking about people further away and when I say, spoken, I include in that a correspondence on some e-mail with a friend of mine that I prayed for earlier. I have spoken to or been contacted by people who have lost that belief. They don't believe that God wants them happy. They don't believe that God wants them secure.

And one of my friends, somebody you won't know but I have known for many, many years, just said to me this week he just feels like ending his life. And there is a youngish man, well he's recently retired from his job and then but has still got lots of life in him and lots of years to go, he retired quite early. He's got a future ahead of him. He's got lovely children, he's got a family; you'd think he had everything in this world, but he's telling me he just feels to utterly insecure, so utterly helpless. He feels that God has abandoned him. He doesn't want to know God.

He said, "I still believe in God. I still believe in Jesus but I just seem to have lost it all and I just want my life to end." And it is very difficult to know what to say to him and how to respond to that.

But I want to just start off with this foundation God wants us to be secure. God wants us to be happy. In fact, in Genesis, Chapter 1, verse 26, God said, "Let us make man in our own image." And for me that I believe; when God said that he meant every single one of us has uniqueness and value.

Now those of you who have known me for a while know that is one of my pet subjects. I'll talk to you a lot about that because I know what it feels like to feel insecure. I know what it feels like to feel unwanted, to feel that you don't have any talents and abilities. And then to discover gradually that you have got talents and abilities, that you are important and you do have worth as an individual and also that you don't have to be like somebody else.

I can always remember one of my colleagues, one of my student colleagues at Bible

College, saying to our tutor, who was a well-known evangelist, “Gosh, it would be good if we could all grow up to be like you, or develop to be like you.” And Doug said, “No, that just isn’t what we want. You are going to grow up to be you. You have your own talents. You have your own abilities. They won’t be the same as mine.” And that was good, that was encouraging. He stressed that we are each valuable and each important.

And I believe that is one of the things the psalmist’s got in mind and that is certainly what God’s got in mind when he says he made us each in our own image.

So let’s have a look at Psalm 1 and see what it’s got to say about this subject. (Thank you, Andy). And first of all I want to talk about standing and walking, negatively and positively. The first word in this Psalm is *blessd* or *blessed*. In the way that Sue read it, it is ‘*blessed is the man*’; in my version here it is ‘*blessed is the one who does not walk*,’ so it includes males and females in case the ladies were going to go to sleep this morning because of the first line.

What does it mean *blessed* or *blessd*? I know it is something that you say sometimes when somebody sneezes, don’t you? Bless you! But there is a lot more meaning in it than that and this is actually quite a rich word in the Old Testament, in the Hebrew word it means *over-blessedness* of, or consider the *blessings*, or count your many *blessings* oh, I won’t try and sing, sorry. That’s really what the writer is saying, he is saying, oh the *blessings* of the man who doesn’t walk in the counsel of the wicked but instead chooses to follow God.

I’m going to read a passage to you, you might find familiar, where that same thought is repeated and it’s some words of Jesus, where Jesus said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

It’s the same word that Jesus is using, “Blessed is the man who . . .”. It’s the same thought as in this Psalm. Jesus too then, well he is God, so he would have the same thought, he wants us to have that security, that significance and that self-worth.

But the psalmist is pointing out in this passage that we live in a pretty rotten world. Do you think that’s true? We live in a world that is pretty full of wickedness. So really what the psalmist, whoever he is, whether he is David or whether he is somebody earlier than that, I don’t know, whoever it is, he’s saying, “You can be happy. You can be blessed, even in a world full of wickedness.”

So how are we going to know that? How are we going to know that in such a wicked world, when there is such a lot of hatred and such a lot of bad stuff, how are we

going to know the blessings of God? Well the psalmist here, the writer here, has made himself a goal. He has said, "I am not going to walk in step with the wicked. I am not going to stand in the way of sinners. I have chosen to live a different kind of life."

That is really what he's saying. He has said there's a negative side to happiness; and the negative side to happiness is to get rid of and separate yourself from the wicked stuff in the world. That is not always easy to do. It kind of affects us.

My wife sometimes says to me, "You've got tomato sauce on your shirt!" That's why I wore this one because it wouldn't show. Or, you know, "You've got a piece of your dinner on your shirt!" It's really, really annoying because I know it's there. I don't need to be told thank you very much. But you know, sometimes she says, "Oh that cardigan is dirty, it needs to go in the wash." And I say, "Well dirt gets on you. It's in the world. It's there. Where did it come from?"

I don't know where it came from. I was walking along and dirt came and got on me. It happens. We live in a written world and it affects us and it touches us and we don't want it to. But this psalmist is saying, "I'm going to live differently. I'm not going to take on board the standards of the world. I have to live with the wicked. I have to live with rotten people," none of you obviously.

I have to look at my newspapers and I have to sometimes meet people who are unkind and come across people who are nasty. I sometimes watch that programme 'Angry Britain', I don't know if you have ever watched that? I don't know why I watch it. It's quite depressing but there we are, I do. I have to live with those things.

But the psalmist says, "I am not going to follow that attitude," that attitude of mind if you like, "I am going to swim against the tide." By the way, if you hadn't realised, that's what the fishes are for, okay? There's one, swimming in the opposite direction, going against the tide.

We used to have a worship band in our church in Tewkesbury some years ago that I used to go out with on gigs, posh words now, and speak for them. They were called Obstinate Fish. And they were called Obstinate Fish because they regarded themselves as Christians swimming against the tide of the world. Does that make sense? Yeah, good, glad you got that one.

So for the psalmist and for the writers in the New Testament, holiness, the way I live is a choice. The problem with the nation of Israel was that they copied the other nations and lost their relationship with God. Their behaviour sometimes was as unjust, unfair and as bad as the other nations that didn't follow God and that was one of their biggest problems.

And so because they chose to live that way, because they chose not to practice justice in their Courts, because they chose to practice getting riches before helping the poor all of those issues that they chose, they didn't get the blessings that God intended for them because they chose to live in the wrong way. Does that make sense?

If I choose to live in a way that is not God's way, I am not going to receive God's blessing. It's kind of obvious in a way. It's just as obvious as if I buy a car or I

buy a washing machine or any other appliance and one other thing my wife says to me quite often, Eunice says to me quite often is, when something won't work, she says, "Read the book! Read the manual!" I say, "I'm a man, you don't do stuff like that."

Carol is always saying to me, she says, "You've got a thing about pressing buttons. If you see a button you press it to see what happens." And I pressed the button for the lift at Meadow Court once and pressed the wrong one and ended up back where I'd started. And I was standing there for ages thinking, where on earth am I? Where am I? How did I get here? So, you know, yeah, it's a choice.

You see if we choose to live against God's way. If we choose to ignore the manual, if we choose to ignore the word of God, if we choose to ignore God's standards, how can we experience God's blessing? So in a way the psalmist is speaking negatively but in a way it's a positive kind of negativism if that makes sense?

He says, "I am not going to live that way. I am not going to take on those attitudes of hatred and anger. I am going to choose not to. When I meet people who are like that I am not going to spend time with them. I am going to let them get on with it. I'm not going to shout about it. I'm just not going to live that way." So that's the first way that this psalmist is saying, "I am going to experience the blessings of God. I am going to choose to reject those wicked attitudes."

And the Bible shows me again and again that this holiness, this kind of life God wants me to live, is a choice. I choose to reject certain ideas. I choose to reject certain attitudes of anger and whatever they might be. So do you believe God wants the best for you in life? If so, there may be some attitudes, quite natural attitudes sometimes, that we need to get rid of. So there needs to be a negative side, the pushing out the bad stuff.

But the next one is the psalmist is also standing still because he goes on in verse 2 to say that his delight, or the delight of the person who has chosen not to walk in the wicked attitudes of the world, that person delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day or night.

Another one of my favourite psalms is Psalm 46. Psalm 46, verse 10 has these words in it: "Be still and know that I am God." And do you know, I always just thought of those words as a call to quiet reflection. Often in the morning before I start everything else I like to sit down for half an hour and just be quiet.

[Gap in the recording whilst the tape was turned over]

... for long, but that's another issue.

Who will take time to be still, enjoy the world around us? But actually in Psalm 46 that is not the thrust of what God is saying. It's important but what God is saying, it's God speaking to the wickedness of the world and the awful things that are happening in the world and basically when it says, "Be still and know that I am God," what God is saying is a word of command.

He is saying, "Be still! Stop! Know that I am God! You can't carry on this wicked way forever. You will have to face the consequences of it in the end." That's the thrust. I'd never realised that until we studied it in House Group the other day.

That is what God is saying. He is speaking to the wicked in the world and saying, “Be still! Stop! Stop your behaviour because things are going to change.”

And really that is what the psalmist is really saying, he is saying, “I’m going to call, I’m going to rely not on the wicked attitudes of the world”, not on the, you know, going up the ladder and meeting those what was it about? climbing down, climbing up the ladder and meeting those coming down or whatever it is because you are thrusting yourself to the top. “I’m not going to have that kind of attitude,” says the psalmist. “I am going to rely instead, choose to rely, on the promise of God.”

What is the foundation of my life? Is it just my experience? Now sometimes experience is good. Sometimes I can look at my experience and I can see how God has moved in my life and I can be grateful for it. Sometimes my experience is challenging. Sometimes I don’t get what I want, probably a good thing in lots of times. But all through those times I had needed to choose deliberately to believe what God says.

Sometimes, yes, I had doubts about my faith. I think we need to be honest about that don’t we. There’s nothing wrong with having doubts. Of course we have doubts. But as I’ve had those doubts, you know, it’s been in the middle of those doubts that I’ve often found the strongest faith. I’ve often found in the middle of those troubles I have found the reality of my faith in Jesus Christ.

I don’t know if you’ve read it but there’s a certain Christian in America, well there has to be I suppose doesn’t it? A certain Christian Pastor in America who has decided for various reasons he is going to try out being an atheist for a year. He is going to give up his faith and he is going to try out atheist attitudes for a year and see what happens. I’m afraid, sorry mate, you can’t do that. It just doesn’t work.

You can’t suddenly decide that God doesn’t exist for a year and then in a year’s time maybe he does or maybe he doesn’t? He either does or he doesn’t and you need to decide to rely and to decide to trust. Just because you’ve had a, yes, you will have doubts. Of course you will have doubts. I recognise that in coming out and saying I’m a pastoral leader in the Church, sometimes I have doubts about my faith, I have questions about my faith. That is honest. That is true. But he needs to hang on in there like the psalmist did.

And the psalmist said, “I’m not just going to read the Bible,” he said, “I’m going to meditate on it.” What does it mean to meditate on the word of God? Well of course it means to read it and it means to consider it, to discuss it, to apply it.

That’s why I’ve got the cow up there in case you were wondering what on earth is a cow doing on there? The cow is ruminating, chewing the cud. I remember learning once about cows have good — how many stomachs is it? Two or three anyway four is it? Good gracious me! One is enough trouble with me I don’t want four! And the food goes through and comes out again and it gets all chewed and all the goodness is pulled out of it.

And that’s the picture the psalmist is giving. He says, “I want to not just read the Bible; I want to listen, I want to meditate, I want to think it through, what does it

mean?” And it may well be he would have sat down and discussed it with others, just as we do when we meet as House Group or other places. We read a passage and we chew it over, we discuss it. What does it mean to you? What does it mean to you? How can I apply that in my life? That is what the psalmist is doing and that is what builds confidence.

I love it because when I read the Bible I discover new stuff all the time. Like it was only the other day studying that Psalm 46 that I realised the thrust of the meaning of that verse was different to what I'd always thought it was. That God was saying something powerful and important in those words so just to learn and to just chew that over.

So the psalmist says, “First of all,” he says, “I choose to reject the standards and attitudes of the world. I'm not going to behave like that because to get the blessings of God, I've got to change my behaviour. And the way I'm going to discover how to behave is to meditate on, to read, to learn, to chew over the word that God has given me.” That doesn't necessarily mean shouting and speaking out in the world.

Do you remember the other day we were talking with Thessalonians about leading a quiet life. In other words it means taking what the word of God says and thinking how does that apply in my life? How should I behave? If I've chosen to reject the wickedness of the world, the attitudes of the world, then how should I behave to take on board what the Bible says? So the psalmist is choosing to live differently.

And finally, well for now anyway, he's bearing fruit for a positive future. Now we have another picture here, a lovely picture in this psalm, the picture of a tree located by the waters. When I went to my sister's in America we spent a day up in the Redwoods Forest on one occasion and they are utterly impressive; brilliant, beautiful trees. But there is also something isn't there about going down to the riverside, going down to the waterside and seeing the trees on the banks of the river and hearing the swish of the water and there is something peaceful about that, something special about that.

And the psalmist I think probably spent time by a river and watched the tree growing and developing and realising that it was drawing its sustenance from the river; drawing its water, drawing its freshness through. And he is saying, “I am going to be like that tree. I want to draw my sustenance and my refreshment from God and from the word of God.” And he said, “I want to grow.” He said, “Because I see that tree and I went down there and it was only a little tree and I went down there a couple of years later and it was a bigger tree and it had lovely, beautiful green leaves on it and it was flourishing.” And maybe if it was a fruit tree it had fruit on it? “And I came back later on and it had more fruit.”

Unlike the apple tree in my parent's garden that had lovely fruit on one year and only one apple every other year; kind of weird that was.

But this tree was growing and developing and maybe the psalmist has seen this tree and he's realised and he's understood and he's said, “I want to be like that tree. I want to be by the side of the water. God's water; God's stream I want to be drawing my strength from him.” And he said, I want to be one who bears fruit for God. I want to be one who lives and behaves the way God wants me to.”

You know, he then says, it goes on to let me just read what is actually says: He says, "This person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither, whatever they do prospers." Ah, the psalmist is saying, "If I follow God I am going to have plenty of money and have a nice suit, a nice car, a nice house; God will give me all those things." I don't think that's quite what he means. I think what he means is, if I can only draw my strength from God, I will have those needs that I really need, that security, that significance and that self-worth. That's the kind of prosperity he's talking about.

He is not necessarily talking about being a rich man. I sometimes think when I see these things on TV, you know, somebody has won goodness knows how many millions of pounds, I don't know what I'd do with it. You know, I think it would actually spoil my life in some ways. I'd just become completely obsessed with how do I spend this money? What do I spend it on? I'd probably give some of it to you but you know, that's not the kind of prosperity the psalmist is talking about.

He's talking about those basic needs. That security, that strength, that self-worth and he says, "If I can be like that tree and draw my sustenance and strength from God and God's word and rely on his promises, then I can have all those things. I can have that kind of prosperity. And the other thing I can know," he says, as he comes towards the end of the psalm, "is that those who've ignored that way will face their come-uppance in the end."

One of the key things about the psalms is that the psalmists are often saying, "Why do the heathen prosper? Why do the wicked people seem to be doing so well?" And then the psalmist says, "Do you know, at the end of the day, they will have to answer to God. They will get their come-uppance. There will come a time when God will deal with the wicked. And God will say, "Enough is enough."

That's the thought again of Psalm 46, when God says, "Be still! Stop! Enough is enough! The world is too wicked. I'm going to come back. I'm going to sort it all out." The psalmist has that trust too. He said, "Because the wicked might think they are prospering now. They might think that things are going okay for them now but it won't last."

It's not going to be easy. We live in a wicked world. We live in a rotten world. (Thank you) But we can make some choices. The choices we can make, like the psalmist in Psalm 1, is first of all to reject the attitudes of the world, to reject the attitudes maybe of revenge, hatred, all of those things that might happen when people ill-treat us; to choose a different pathway.

Where will we find that pathway? We will find it in the word of God, which we choose to meditate on. We choose to consider it's meaning, talk it over together, share it together, bring the meaning into our lives and turn it into reality and then to discover what God means by prosperity.

To discover what God means by prosperity; not necessarily wealth and riches. Not necessarily all the things that the world wants to get but rather that security in God. Who I am, that significance, I can be used by God. That self-worth, I am of value to him. It is a very positive psalm. Not for the wicked it isn't, ha, it's quite a negative one for them. They are going to get their come-uppance in the end, unless of course the turn and trust God.