

# The Truth about Happiness

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're going to turn to our Bible reading now, and we're taking a little break from Luke's Gospel for the summer. While lots of people are away, we'll come back to that at the end of August.

But we're going to look this morning at Psalm number 1, the very beginning of the Psalter. You'll find that on page 448 if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles.

And here is the Psalm, which along with Psalm 2, sometimes they're called the gateway to the Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms isn't just a random collection of 150 Psalms or songs.

They're actually quite carefully ordered. There's five clear sections, five books of Psalms. And the first and the second Psalm are very important because they lay a framework.

They lay a whole worldview through which the rest of the songs of the psalmist really need to be understood. And there's Psalms which teach us a very great deal.

[ 1 : 02 ] So let's look together at this very first Psalm. Blessed or happy is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, stands not in the way of sinners, sits not in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, the instruction of the Lord.

And on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers. Not so the wicked. They are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Amen. May God bless us. This is his word. Well, do turn with me to Psalm number 1, page 448, I think.

[ 2 : 29 ] 448, if you have one of the church visitors' Bibles. A psalm all about the truth about happiness.

The quest for happiness is the great quest for every human being, I think, on our planet, is it not? And we're not short of voices telling us how to attain it.

The vast advertising industry pulls in billions every year, doesn't it? By delivering those messages to us day after day. Mostly telling us, of course, that happiness comes by consuming more.

Our whole economic health in the West today, in fact the whole world over today, is measured by consumption. And the government is certainly happy, isn't it, if we are consuming more, so that our gross national product is increasing.

That's the only way it increases now, as we consume more. Well, consumption certainly leads to growth of a certain kind. But not always with a happy ending.

[ 3 : 32 ] I read in the paper today that Britain's heaviest man died this week, aged 33. He was 65 stone. Well, obviously a great consumer, but a far from happy end.

And perhaps, actually, that is a metaphor for the way that we are consuming our way, not to health and happiness, but in fact to something quite different in our modern world.

But our world is certainly not short of recipes for human happiness. It's found in wealth. It's found in possessions. It's found in education. It's found in sexual fulfillment.

It's found in the unbridled personal freedom that we all seek. It's found in love of sport or music or travel or all the different things that your weekend newspapers have pull-out supplements all about.

If you go out into the street today and you ask people where happiness is to be found, I'm sure you'll get plenty of answers ranging around those kind of things. But I'd be surprised, actually, if many people that you ask that question to would tell you the answer, well, the key to real happiness is found in the Bible.

[ 4 : 47 ] And yet the Bible, friends, claims to hold that key. And it claims to hold the only true key to real human happiness. We're looking at Psalm 1, which, as I said, is the beginning of a whole book of Psalms.

It's sometimes called the hymn book of the people of God, the people of Israel, and it certainly is that. But it is full of deep and important teaching about God.

And by the way, that's what all hymns and songs that God's people sing should be full of, not just slush and pap and sentimentality. Teaching profoundly about God.

And the Psalms are a book of teaching. I said it's carefully arranged in five books. That's probably to correspond to the five books of Moses, the books of the law. It's to make the point that the Psalms also are God's Torah, his law, his instruction for human life.

And it's no accident that Psalm 1 and 2 form a pair right at the beginning of the Psalter. In fact, it may well have been one Psalm all together right at the beginning. And these Psalms are the gateway to the whole of the book of Psalms.

[ 5 : 56 ] And they give us the basics that we need to know as we read on into the rest of the book of Psalms. And you can see it's all about the key to true happiness. Psalm 1 verse 1 begins, and Psalm 2 ends with the word happy or blessed.

Here is the truth that leads to real happiness in life. And we need to see this. And we need to get this straight.

Or else we'll never understand all the many things that are said throughout the rest of the Psalms or many of the expressions about life that the Psalms give voice to so comprehensively.

You won't understand the world's history, and you won't ever understand or find true happiness unless you grasp the two fundamental things that these two Psalms teach us.

Psalm 2 teaches us the truth about world history. We'll look at that next week. It says that it's God's Son that rules the world. And therefore, the only way to true happiness for this world as a whole is to recognize that and to embrace the rule of God's Son.

[ 7 : 10 ] Look at Psalm 2 verse 12. Kiss the Son. Blessed are all who find refuge in Him. And Psalm 1 tells us the truth about real personal happiness.

It tells us that God's Word directs this whole world, and therefore, the only way to true happiness for every human being is, well, look at Psalm 1 verse 2.

Blessed, happy is the man whose delight is in the law, in the instruction of the Lord. The real truth about human happiness is to be found not in listening to the many competing voices of this world, but to the one voice that we hear in God's Word.

That's the claim of this Psalm. In fact, that's the claim of the whole Bible. Only the Christian, and only the Christian life, can be the truly happy and prosperous life in this present world.

Now, if you're not a committed Christian, I'm sure you will find that very difficult to believe. Perhaps you can find it rather offensive. But let me say that many Christians also find it rather difficult to believe, because it just so often seems not to be so.

[ 8 : 31 ] It so often seems that it is not a Christian who is perfectly happy, but that many others who are not Christians are much happier than you are. So it's a bold claim, but a difficult one for us.

So we better examine this Psalm carefully and see if the claims that it makes can actually stand up to proper scrutiny. Especially this claim to real happiness, real blessedness, and that it belongs not to those who ignore God's words and God's ways, who so often seem to be happy and prosperous, but that it belongs to those who, as verse 2 says, delight in the law of God.

Because that word blessed, it does mean happy. It means to be fulfilled. It means to have what we all long for and want to have. And it means to be what we all long to be and want to be.

So let's start then at the heart of the Psalm. Look at verses 3 and 4, where the real life of happiness is pictured for us. So beautifully as a life of prosperous fruitfulness.

Prosperity is pictured here as real fruitfulness. What a lovely picture it is. A healthy, vibrant, fruit-bearing tree planted as it is by streams of water.

[ 9 : 53 ] There's nothing more lovely, is there, in a dry desert climate than a beautiful, lush green tree full of beautiful, colorful, juicy fruit. That's the picture here.

A well-watered tree, productively bearing fruit. You've got to remember, of course, the Psalmist didn't live in Scotland. And his view on things is really rather different. We don't really value big, bushy green trees when the sun's shining, do we?

We want to get the rays. We get so few of them. The last thing we want is our gardens all being shaded. But that is the very thing that you do want, isn't it? If it's baking heat of 40 degrees and blasting sunlight all day long.

Think of the picture of a barren desert with the dried, gnarled, spiky old trees dotted around the place, nowhere even to shade. And think of the wonderful contrast of the oasis of life that's full of lush green foliage.

It's a picture of the life in the place of death, isn't it? So this is a picture of life, of steady, stable, strong life. It's not a dead picture.

[10:59] It's not a picture of dullness. It's not the image of a tower or a wall. That's strong and steady, but it's dead. It's not alive. No, this is a tree. It's living.

It's growing. It's productive. It's creative. It yields its fruit in season. Not like our supermarket fruit, which you get all the year round now.

So in the middle of January, you get strawberries that come from goodness knows where, but they taste like sawdust. It's not that. This is fruit in season. This is natural, delicious, sweet to the taste. And here is a tree that is drawing steadily and dependably on the soil, on the air, on the nutrients, above all on the water, to produce something that is delightful and something tasty.

You see, it's a picture, isn't it, of life, a life, a human life that is productive and prosperous. Taking all the natural elements of that life, all the gifts and nature and opportunities, and reaching its full potential.

[12:05] Being abundantly fruitful as it was designed to be. There's absolutely nothing unattractive in this picture of life, is there? Isn't that the kind of life that any right-thinking person wants to have?

And notice, there's nothing spurious about it. There's no false dawns, nothing fleeting. Verse 3, its leaf does not wither. It doesn't mean it's unnatural. It doesn't mean it's immune to autumn or anything like that.

It just means it's immune from the withering effects of drought because it's rooted in soil that is well watered. The few things in life that are so tragic, so sad as a fruitful and prosperous life that is suddenly blighted in its prime.

Think of the singer who suddenly dies young of a drug overdose or the brilliant artist who's doing wonderfully well and then kills himself.

Or anybody for that matter, anybody whose talent is wasted, so obvious, but through bad advice or bad company or whatever it is who just fall away and blight their whole life.

[13:16] Life that suddenly wilts like a plant, like flowers that you go out and one day in your garden all of a sudden something's happened and it just died. It's so sad, isn't it, when we see a human life blighted and struck off early like that.

I think of Charlie Kennedy who died so untimely just a few weeks ago. But you see, this man, according to the psalmist, is not like that. There's no false promise with him.

He's strong and stable. He's rooted for growth. He's steady. He's dependably fruitful. He prospers. He doesn't disappoint.

Now that is just the kind of man, let me say, that a father wants his daughter to get married to, is it not? Or just the kind of woman that you want your son to find and spend her life with.

Verse 3, everything he does prospers. That is an astonishing claim, isn't it? It really is. Can it really be true?

[14:20] Or is the psalmist some kind of charlatan? Is he offering us dreams that actually can only disappoint, that are fantasies? Is he the worst kind of prosperity merchant? Everything he does prospers.

Can that be true? It's a very bold claim with no caveats at all. It seems so hard to believe that anyone could know such complete prosperity, complete satisfaction in life.

Especially when we hear what people sometimes admit about their lives, even when it seems to all the world that everything is going right and everything is prospering for them. It's often very revealing, isn't it, to read the biographies or the autobiographies of famous people.

I remember reading an article about the pop star Madonna some years ago when she was at the height of her success and her fame and so on. And yet, in the middle of that article, she said this, I'm a very tormented person.

I just want to be happy. I found that very striking. Or the artist, Tracy Emin. All the prizes and fame and all of these things.

[ 15 : 27 ] But in her biography, she admitted, in terms of emotional values, I'm a loser. Isn't that striking? Yeah, when you look at it, it's amazing how many very successful people in life are in fact so very dissatisfied with life when you begin to poke under the surface.

So if people who have it all and seem to have it all still can't find true happiness, what on earth hope is there for the rest of us who don't seem to have it all? It's very hard to believe, verse 3, isn't it? It's very hard to believe that this is really something possible for human life. And actually, when you look at verse 4, that's a pretty hard verse to believe too.

Not so the wicked. I mean, that is a real problem to us. Because it often does seem that the most satisfied and the most prosperous people are people of, well, very dubious reputation.

Not those who are kind and gentle and deserving and all the things that we would want to see in a person. So who are these wicked who are so rootless, so useless that they can be cast aside just like the chaff blown away?

[ 16 : 44 ] It's a very stark contrast, isn't it? Between a tree, which is a productive, living organism producing fruit, and chaff, which is just utterly useless, weightless, nothing, blown away.

It's a very sharp contrast. And you see, life doesn't seem to be as clear-cut as that, does it? Not only is it hard to believe this picture of relentless prosperity, that it really does exist, it's also very hard to see that the world divides so neatly into the righteous who prosper and the wicked who don't prosper.

Is that the world as you see it? And so we say, well, this psalm surely is naive. It's far too simplistic. Surely it's just dealing in make-believe.

Well, friends, it may look like that, but that is not so. Notice, in verses 3 and 4, the contrast isn't quite as straightforward as it might first seem to be.

Because when you think about it, chaff is not separated from grain while it's still growing, is it? It's only after the harvest, only at the time of wintering, only then, when everything is thrown up in the air and it comes back down to earth, that's when the sifting happens, doesn't it?

[ 18 : 06 ] The solid grain comes down, but the chaff is blown away. And until then, it is very difficult to see and to separate the wheat from the chaff.

It's all mixed together, isn't it? And that is exactly true to life. You see, there is no naivety in the psalmist. One of the commonest sighs and cries as you read through the psalms is the complaint. Why do the wicked prosper? Oh Lord. And why do the godly seem to be stricken, seem to suffer the most? Read through the psalms and you'll find that honest cry is there all the time.

But you see, the answer is here in psalm number one. And the answer is that there is more to this than meets the eye. Real happiness does mean a life of prosperous fruitfulness.

And it can be known and it can be fully enjoyed. But only if we understand that the truth about happiness can't be properly grasped without grasping that the life of real happiness is also a life with a permanent future.

[ 19 : 16 ] look at verses five and six. You see, they focus very clearly, don't they, upon permanence and upon the only life that has a real permanent future.

See, the psalmist isn't naive. He's not unaware of the questions that we find ourselves asking about his claims about real happiness and prosperity and fruitfulness. but he knows that what we see on the surface, what we see in life now is not the whole story.

And what he tells us here in verses five and six is that we can't really understand anything about real happiness and real prosperity in the present world until we grasp the truth about life's ultimate destiny.

You see, we're dealing not just with a present life. But we're dealing with a permanent life, with a life with a real future. And we cannot separate the one from the other because, look at verse five, you see, there is a winnowing to come.

There's a day of judgment. And the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. No, you see, at the harvest winnowing there will be a great separation.

[ 20 : 32 ] And so, because that is so, we can't hope to discover the kind of happiness and prosperity that's real and fruitful in the present, the kind of life that verse three describes, we can't hope to discover it unless we see that it is inseparable from the life that has a permanent future.

The life that will stand in the judgment. The life that will continue beyond the judgment and doesn't perish in the judgment. Let me just briefly address a problem here.

It's often said, and you may have heard that in the Old Testament we don't find anything about eternal life. We don't find anything about resurrection or anything like that. That's just an idea that comes in in the New Testament. I want to show you that quite clearly that is simply nonsense. You can see that plainly just from this one psalm alone. I'm sure you can. This psalmist here is speaking with great clarity, is he not, about a judgment to come that will separate permanently those who stand, verse 5, and will keep standing, who will be maintained by God through the judgment, and those who will collapse and perish, as verse 6 says, into permanent ruin.

[ 21 : 48 ] Of course, it's not quite the same language as the New Testament uses, but it's very plain all the same. The psalmist sees life as permanent and life as stretching into a permanent future beyond death and judgment.

And that permanent future is characterized either by the permanent presence of the Lord, who knows the way of the righteous, verse 6, or by being cut off from the presence of the Lord, which is what it means to perish.

And this is so, so important to be clear about. In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us very plainly in the end of the book of Acts that the great hope of Israel, the great hope of resurrection, is this permanent life beyond the dead.

That's why he was on trial, he says in Acts 24. And the whole Bible, when it speaks of life, means that real permanent life lived in the presence of God, life in all its fullness. The only life that is truly happy and fruitful and prosperous and blessed. Because it's not cut short, because it's not snuffed out. And that's the psalmist's perspective here in this psalm.

[ 23 : 00 ] Just in fact, as it is the perspective all the way through. For example, the book of Proverbs. It's just worth you turning over to Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 2 just to see this clearly.

I think it's page 533 if you have one of the church Bibles. Proverbs 1 to 9 is the introduction to the collection of what's called the Proverbs of Solomon, which begin here in Proverbs chapter 10. And what do you find right at the beginning in Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 2? It's a message all about deliverance from death. Do you see? Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.

Turn over to Proverbs chapter 12 and verse 28. You'll see the same again. in the path of the righteous is life and in its pathway there is no death.

That's pretty clear, isn't it? It's the same in Proverbs 14 verse 32. There's a clear parting of the ways. It's the same in chapter 23 verse 18. Don't turn that up now, but do turn to Proverbs 24 for one last reference just so you can see it clearly.

[ 24 : 13 ] Proverbs 24 and the great contrast between verse 14 and verse 20. Verse 14. If you'll find wisdom, the wisdom that comes from the fear of the Lord, there will be a future, he says, and your hope will not be cut off.

But look down to verse 20. The evil man has no future and the lamp of the wicked will be put out. You see, verses like these are the key to the whole of the book of Proverbs and they're the key to our psalm here in Psalm 1.

Sometimes people think about the Proverbs or a psalm like Psalm 1 and they think that somehow the writer is peddling some kind of prosperity gospel that's at variance with the New Testament, but it's not so at all.

See, these writers are not viewing life as just this life. They're seeing life as one permanent life that's lived in the presence of the Lord God and with a permanent future beyond judgment also for those who live in his presence and go on doing so.

And so his promise of real happiness, of real fruitfulness, of real prosperity is a real promise for this permanent life lived in the presence of God.

[ 25 : 32 ] It's not that he's separating and saying that it's spiritual prosperity now and material prosperity then or even the other way around for that matter. Now he is speaking of the one real, lasting, solid prosperity and happiness in life that will remain real and solid even through the judgment because it won't be blown away like chaff.

He is speaking of a prosperous fruitfulness with a permanent future. And that's what this whole psalm is all about.

And only the day of judgment will finally reveal to the whole world what true prosperity and true happiness has always been. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3, then it will be clear to all what was all

along just wood and hay and chaff or what was in fact gold and silver and precious stones that will last.

Sure, it can be hard to see it in a messed up world, in a mixed up world. It can be hard to see what the psalmist sees so very clearly that there will be a division between the righteous and the wicked. Just as it can be hard to tell the difference, can't it, if you're an amateur between a false gem and a real gem. But the expert can see it.

[ 27 : 01 ] It's hard for us to tell just by looking at a building that is built with solid foundations and a building that has been jerry-built on the cheap. But when the earthquake comes, you will see, won't you, which one stands and which one falls.

The trained eye can see these things, of course, just as the investor who's wise can see the long-term profit in an overlooked and despised security, just as an auctioneer.

Knows the right reserve price for the item he's auctioning. Even though the artifact might just look like it was a piece of junk out of your cellar to you and me.

And you see, the psalmist is trying to train our eyes to see with that long-term view. Because our perspective on what is true happiness and true prosperity must take in the permanence of life as well as what we see in this present life.

And only if we begin to see that will we begin to see where true happiness really is and where true prosperous fruitfulness really will lie in this life. I've got new glasses recently.

[ 28 : 12 ] And the reason is because I now suffer from presbyopia. Which sounds better than old man's eyes, which is just what it means. It's a rather humbling thing and I'm not the only one in here who's got it.

I've always been short-sighted and I've had to have glasses to see far into the distance. But the problem with this presbyopia is that you lose your accommodation and I can't even see things close up now. So for months and months I've been having my glasses on and off and on and off and on and off and trying to see different things.

But now you see, I've got the wonderful new world of very focals. I can see some of you smiling because you know what I'm saying. And I have seamless vision now from the nearest to the furthest.

There's a continuum of clarity. If I look through these glasses I can see my notes right and clear here and I can look at the back and I can see you picking your nose. So stop it. You see, that's what the psalmist is saying that we need.

He's saying put your very focal glasses on. See the present in the light of the permanent. see that the most perplexing questions of life will begin to make sense when you see with clarity the future that is coming.

[ 29 : 28 ] Only that is going to make sense of your view of the present. That's a great message in many of the psalms. Psalm 73 I'm sure some of you know very well. There's great perplexity for the believer who's looking around at the world in front of him where the wicked seem to flourish and the godly seem to suffer.

And he cannot understand it until he goes he says into the sanctuary of God and then I perceived their end. It's the same in Psalm 37.

It seems to be the wicked he says there the wicked who spread like a beautiful green tree. The picture of prosperity now in the present. But no he says in verse 36 of that psalm he passes away and there's no more.

The future the future of the wicked will be cut off. By total contrast says the psalmist there is a future for the man of peace.

The one at peace with God. So to grasp the truth friends about real happiness real prosperous fruitfulness in life we must see it in terms not just of the present but of a permanent future.

[ 30 : 41 ] We need our very focal lenses. It's the permanent future that is the key to present fruitfulness in life. Well then if that's so we've got to ask haven't we what is the heart what is the secret of the life that is permanently fruitful.

The life that doesn't perish. The life that doesn't disappear into insignificance like the chaff blown away by the wind. Well the clue is there in verse 6. It's the life that knows or rather is known by the Lord God.

Now that word to know in the Bible means intimate knowledge personal knowledge of a real personal relationship. And the psalmist is saying that to have that truly with the Lord with the God of

the Bible that is what it means to be righteous and not wicked.

Simple as that. Well what does that mean? How can I have that? What does that real life of knowing God actually look like in the flesh?

You see that's what is pictured for us in verses 1 and 2 where the psalmist tells us that real happiness in life real prosperity in life is to be found in the life of penitent faith.

[ 32 : 02 ] See verses 1 and 2 are so very important just because well just because people today do find that stark contrast that the Bible makes between the righteous and the wicked they find it very difficult.

It's very black and white isn't it? It's very fundamentalist certainly not politically correct to talk in these terms. And people say understandably life is just not so simple.

There's always a spectrum isn't there? From the very very good to the very very bad. There are many many many shades of grey. We can't surely be so stark. And that's how people think and I think probably deep down that's how most of us think even those of us who are Christians.

We all have our scale of values of what is a really good person and what is a really bad person. If you tell me which newspaper you read I can probably tell you what your scale of values will be.

For some no doubt the top of the righteous list will be Florence Nightingale and Mother Teresa Mary Berry perhaps Margaret Thatcher and the bottom of your list will be gamblers and drug dealers and BBC journalists George Galloway but you see you might be very different and the top of your list of the saints and the really good ones might be people like Bob Geldof and Bono Russell Brand perhaps even those are your saints and your sinners will be fat cats people with a big carbon footprint Nigel Farage I don't know people like that we've all got our scales of virtue and vice we can pretend we haven't but we have even prisoners have their scale you go into prison and it's very obvious isn't it the sex offenders are right at the bottom of the heap way below even the murderers and the thieves are somewhere above them and you see in our own scales of goodness to badness like that we all place ourselves probably quite comfortably above those that we like to look down on and despise we all do if you're

[ 34 : 07 ] American you're probably putting yourself at A minus or somewhere like that you have a pretty positive outlook on things if you're English you're probably quite modestly down at B minus if you're Scottish you probably don't care where you are as long as you can look down on the English but we laugh but it's true it's true isn't it we all have our own moral league tables and we all place ourselves very comfortably way above that kind of naming and shaming area of total failure and total badness we're all comfortably in the realm of decency and the deserving good I would suggest but we need to get this very very clear friends the picture that we have here in verses 1 and 2 look at it of those who are really righteous those who are not the wicked it is not a picture of that kind of moral construct at all it's not a statement of moral virtue in any way whatsoever whatever your scale may be it is simply a description of whether or not you are someone who is really known by

God and knows God or whether you don't it's a matter of who owns and who directs your whole life is it the world of men or is it the word of God that's the contrast and that is much much more fundamental than any matter of personal morality it's a matter of where our whole life source is fed from the stream that our tree of life is drawing on for all its vigour for all its sustenance that is what verses 1 and 2 contrast one is fed and watered and planted in a living relationship with the Lord and the other is rooted not in the word of God but in the way of the world it's the world or it's God's word and the righteous man is one who can know true prosperity and permanent prosperity and fruitfulness and happiness because he is in a right relationship with the life giving

God according to verse 1 and he is one therefore who utterly rejects do you see a defining relationship with the world of men and rather instead he delights in God's instruction about life in God's way about how it's to be lived in God's word about to whom his life belongs his delight verse 2 is in the law of the Lord in the instruction of God you see you can always tell can't you a love relationship you can tell whether it's real or not because there's real interest and delight in the words of the other person you see a young person in love they are lit up when a letter comes through the door or they get an email or I suppose today it's a what is it a snapchat or something from the person that they love even if they're the mangled words of a text they're pouring over it by contrast sadly when a marriage is breaking down or broken down often the first thing to go are the words isn't that so we don't talk anymore because words convey the very deepest things about ourselves words reveal what animate us what light us up reveal the things that make us tick you can tell somebody who's a mad keen football fan or a computer buff or a train spotter or whatever it

is you can tell by what they talk about well here you see the righteous the one who is known by God and is in a relationship with God's law by God's words by his instruction by every word that God gives to his people for life and likewise he's resolute in his rejection of the words of the world the world's instruction about how to live life to the full away from the world and turning to God that's what the Bible means by penitent faith turning away from the way of the world that rejects God and turning towards God and cherishing and loving his words and notice how wholesale and wholehearted and how ongoing it is three times there's those negatives not not not the world see at the heart of the biblical faith are these necessary negatives that's what the Bible means by that word repentance it says no no to the world's wisdom to the counsel of the wicked the advice the thinking the opinions of the world that so dominate our culture today in its intellectual life in the arts in the media in advertising and so on no no it says no to the world's ways the morality and the behavior of a society which is so intolerant of anyone who dares to question its prevailing morality its prevailing view for example on the sexual consensus about what marriage really is and things like that it says no to the whole world view of the world the seat of scoffers the settled attitudes the givens of our society today it's pluralism that all ways and all things are equally valid the scorn of any absolute values of right and wrong the scoffing at anything to do with the Christian view as though it was just dated and long since dead but you see this man the truly happy and prosperous man is the one who says no to the whole onslaught of the world's wisdom and its advice and its morality and its attitudes and instead he says yes to the instruction of the Lord not just grudging acceptance but verse two says delight he meditates day and night that means he makes it part of the very fabric of his whole life and his livelihood that says the psalmist is what real righteousness looks like that's what it means to know God that's what it means to be known by him and that and that alone is the path to real and lasting happiness the path to real prosperity and real permanence it's the path of real penitence penitent faith turning away from the world and its ways and turning to

[ 40 : 52 ] God in his ways revealed in his word that is a river of living water most fully revealed of course in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ himself whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst forever said Jesus it'll become in him a spring of living water welling up to eternal life the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life but not so the wicked says the psalm in verse four you see friends the wicked are not just axe murderers and rapists and Hitler and Stalin and Pol Pot look at verse two the wicked are those who do not delight in the word of God it's those who say no to God's voice and yes to the world's voice and that should make us sit up and think shouldn't it because you see our ideas our league tables all of that kind of thinking about life is so so wrong what matters and the only thing that does matter is whether we heed

God's call and hear his word and do what he says and we need to be careful you can see in verse one the progression can't you from walking to standing to sitting you see he's saying don't think you can have it both ways or that just a little bit of the world's ways won't do any harm you see the counsel of the wicked its advice its wisdom it will lead inevitably to experimentation with the world's ways its behavior destiny to what you are to where you sit not just ultimately defying him in your life but ultimately scoffing about him and about his people and friends I've seen as I'm sure some of you have seen that progression take place over the lifespan of some of the people that you know and you love and it's a terrifying thing isn't it but be clear says the psalmist that way leads only in the end to collapse and to ruin permanent collapse and ruin they will not stand verse 5 they will perish verse 6 and that is a picture of many people here in

Glasgow in our city in 2015 and although people can't see it that is the reason why so many people in our city and in our nation and in our world are so very unhappy unfulfilled and unfruitful and so this psalm's message is desperately needed in our world today as with a warning to those who are refusing Jesus Christ and as an encouragement to those who are following him so let me finish with these two things first the warning you cannot and will not have a truly happy and fruitful life or a life that will last if you do not delight yourself in the word of God in the revelation of God made known in all its fullness in the gospel of Jesus Christ be in no doubt about that friends no matter what this world may say no matter what many confused religious people might say Jesus is as clear as the psalmist abide in my love he says if you keep my commandments you will abide in my love don't call me lord and not do what

I tell you it's the one who hears my words and does them who builds the house that will stand in the judgment said Jesus Jesus isn't talking is he about about a one off decision about professing faith

one day and saying you love him and then nothing really changes nor is the psalmist speaking in that way is he only the tree that continually sucks in the stream of living water will bear fruit only the life that continually delights in the gospel of Christ day after day will bear fruit and only that life of prosperous fruitfulness can have a permanent feature and that means a life of penitent faith daily every day every single day friends gives us so many opportunities doesn't it to say no to the world and to say yes to the instruction of the

Lord Jesus Christ it's a daily challenge and we need daily grace and daily mercy and daily forgiveness and daily renewal my goodness how much I need those things daily but let me finish with a wonderful reassurance this psalm tells us that every believer can have a prosperous and fruitful and fulfilling life every ordinary person who is right with God because they know him and because they are known by him and because they delight in his word sometimes people think you see that they have to have some special experience or they have to have some special blessing in their life or some special calling or some great gift which they don't have to be truly fulfilled and happy and fruitful in life not so not so the simple truth about real happiness and fruitfulness and prosperity both now and permanently is simply to delight in the word of God to delight in his instruction to delight in his gospel so that it becomes part of the fabric of your whole being directing your daily path and that is a promise for every single ordinary

[ 47 : 00 ] Christian believer like you and me none of your labor in the Lord is in vain says Paul in 1st Corinthians 15 58 none of your labor in the Lord for him can ever be in vain when like the psalmist you see your present life in the light of that permanent future that God has for us and when we walk daily in the way of humble penitent faith in the Lord Jesus Christ none of your work life or your study or your business life is in vain it will be fruitful for Jesus Christ none of your family life none of your church life and your service for him is in vain it will prosper under God's good hand and none of the struggles that you face in your own Christian life the deep painful struggles with sin in your life none of these struggles will be in vain it will stand in the judgment says the psalmist and says the Lord

Jesus Christ Christ because the Lord knows the way of the righteous those who know him and love him and delight in his word he knows that way God's word directs this whole world and so happy is the man now and forever who finds his delight there and makes it his food and drink now and all his life long blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of the sinner nor sits in the seat of scoffers but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night let's pray our gracious heavenly father how we thank you that you have set before us the path of life that you have come to save us that you might set our feet upon that path and by your holy spirit in our hearts instructing us from your word lead us day by day in the way everlasting how we thank you and how we praise you and how we ask our gracious God that you would guard us and keep us in that way forever that each day live now for Jesus our Savior might be full of blessing and fruitfulness fruitfulness which will last to the glory of the great God of heaven in whose name we pray amen