

The Permanent Life

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] We come now to our Bible reading, which is the first psalm, psalm number one. And if you have one of our big church Bibles, you'll find that on page 448, 448.

Willie Philip, our pastor, is going to be preaching to us again on this. He started a series on the psalm last week. I think it runs on for a third week, Willie, isn't that right? Next week as well, so we're going to have three sermons.

So here we have the opening psalm, which in a sense sets the tone and the direction of the whole book of psalms. Psalm 1. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, 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. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but 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.

[1 : 22] For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Here ends our reading, and may the Lord make it a blessing to us tonight.

As you turn to Psalm number one, let me first apologize for sounding like a foghorn, and then apologize in advance for when I cough into the microphone.

There's only one thing worse than the speaker at the front coughing, and that is when he's got one of these microphones and can't turn away from it. So if I blast you with a cough, I do apologize. Now we're back in Psalm number one, and we were looking at this last week.

We'll be looking at, as Edward says, next week. And that is because the Psalms are not just for singing. We've sung two Psalms tonight, and they certainly are for singing, but they're not just for singing.

They're for teaching as well. They're part of the writings. The Old Testament, as the Israelites thought of them, consisted of three parts. The law, the prophets, and the writings, sometimes called the Psalms.

[2 : 28] And so the Psalms, like all scriptures, are, as the Apostle Paul says, are for us, and they are to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

They teach us about God and about ourselves and about the way of salvation. Now last week, we looked particularly at the center of this little Psalm, verses 3 and 4, which pictures that life of present prosperity.

It's a wonderful picture, as Edward says, of a tree planted by sweet waters, and not withering, but bearing fruit, and going on bearing fruit. And we saw, I hope, last time, the promise that the life of true prosperity, that is the life of stability, of solidity, of fruitfulness, and a need of fulfillment, that that life is not found in the way of the world, that scoffs and mocks at God.

Rather, that way of true prosperity is found in the way of the word, the word of God. That is the real way to a life that does not disappoint, heeding his word, his instruction.

That's the true way to the life that will not wither, and will not fail to reach its true potential. Verse 3, Its leaf does not wither, but rather, it yields its fruit in season, in all that he does, all that he does, he prospers.

[4 : 06] That's the clear way to present blessing in life, in all the things that really do matter. And, the other thing we saw is that this is not elusive, this is not something just for the favored few, who discover the mystery, who find that holy grail of the secret of a happy life.

No, not at all. Nor is it only for the unusually blessed, or the unusually gifted, those sort of people who have all the things that, well, you and I could never have.

No, it's for the ordinary believer. It's for the person who just loves the word of God, and therefore who lives the word of God.

Verse 2, Whose delight is in the law, in the instruction of the Lord, who meditates on it day and night. By the way, that's not describing any sort of spiritual heroic 24-7 non-stop Bible reading. Don't be silly. Of course not. It just simply means, it's for all who will live their life, guided and directed and constrained in every way, by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord, and not, by contrast, from the words of the folly that claims to be man's wisdom.

[5 : 30] And we can be confident that this promise is true, because God says it here quite plainly, absolutely unequivocally. So the psalm is saying to us, don't listen to the world's voice, however loud it is.

And of course, the world's voice is loud. It's incessant all around us. Many voices all around us today offering us a very different way to prosperity and to fulfillment.

But no, says the psalmist, listen to God's clear, unambiguous promise. Listen to the Word of God and learn to love the Word of God.

That's the way to real blessing in life. Now, of course, it can be hard to believe that, can't it? Even for Christian believers sometimes.

But remember, this is not a promise of ever-present physical bliss in this life. The tree whose leaf doesn't wither in this hour, it's not a magical tree.

[6 : 35] It's not that this tree is immune from all the sort of normal, seasonal changes of autumn and winter and so on. But what it is protected from is the sudden blight, the southern withering that's caused by the pressures of heat and the pressures of drought.

And that is because it has a permanent source of life. Verse 3, because it's rooted where? By streams of water. And just so with the life of true fruitfulness.

It's not the life that is perfect, that's permanently full of physical bliss, that's immune from all the normal challenges and the trials of life in this world.

Of course not. The Bible never says that. But rather, it is the life of fruitfulness and fulfillment in the midst of a world that is still far from right.

It's like a life lived in an oasis right in the middle of a desert where a tree can prosper because it's surrounded all around in the desert by withering and death, but it has its roots in the life-giving water that overcomes the aridness of the desert that enables ongoing life even in a desert land.

[7 : 56] The psalmist is not naive. He's not talking about make-believe. He's not saying, oh, let's pretend. Let's pretend as though everything in life really is rosy.

And that is clear because he makes equally clear to us in the psalm that this present life is not the whole story. I'm sure you saw that. This psalm isn't just a picture of the present life of the believer, the present life of satisfaction and of fruitfulness.

It points us clearly, doesn't it, to the believer's permanent life that triumphs in the future. And what he's telling us in this psalm is that that is absolutely inseparable from the fruitful life in the present, and it's the one that explains the other.

Psalmist's point is clear that the believer's life, the Christian life now in the present, can only be a truly prosperous life because the Christian life is the only permanent life.

And it's this aspect, the permanent life that I want to focus on today. That's the focus of verses 5 and 6 of the psalm. Psalmist isn't naive. He's certainly not unaware of the kind of questions that we find ourselves asking ourselves about his claims.

[9 : 20] We ask, don't we, well, why, if that's true, why does it so often seem like it is those who are not godly but who are wicked, who are the ones that truly prosper in life?

The psalms are full of that very question. The psalmist isn't naive at all. If you flick on just a few pages to psalm number 10, you'll see just one very clear example of it. Here he is.

Verse 3. The wicked boasts of the desires of his soul and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord. In the pride of his face, the wicked does not seek him.

All his thoughts are there is no God. His ways prosper at all times. And your judgments are on high, out of his sight. As for all his foes, he puffs at them.

You see, the psalmist is not naive. He recognizes reality. But, it's just that he says to us that there is more to this than first meets the eye.

[10 : 23] And what he's telling us is this, that you can't understand about true prosperity in the present until you have grasped properly the truth about life's ultimate destiny.

It's permanent nature. You see, if we're thinking about real prosperity, about real happiness, about real life, we have to grasp that we're not just dealing with a present life.

We are dealing with a permanent life. And you cannot separate the one from the other. The psalmist knows that what we're seeing on the surface of life now isn't the whole story.

Look at verse 4. He's clear, isn't he? There's a day of winnowing that's to come. There's a day when the wheat and the chaff are going to be separated. And the chaff is going to be like the wind blown away.

What does he mean? Well, look at verse 5. It's absolutely explicit, isn't it? There's a day of judgment coming. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners, in the congregation of the righteous.

[11 : 30] There's a separation between the wicked and the righteous that is coming. And because that's so, he's telling us, you can't begin to find any kind of prosperity that's real in the present unless you see that the present life is inseparable from the permanent life.

The life that goes beyond what he calls in verse 5 the coming judgment. Now let me address a problem here. It may be a problem to some of you.

It's often stated, and you may have heard it said, it's often stated quite unequivocally by scholars of the Bible that the Old Testament knows absolutely nothing of the idea of eternal life.

Or that the Old Testament knows nothing of the idea of resurrection or anything like that. That, it is said, is a New Testament invention. No foundation at all in the Old Testament scriptures.

And it's often stated as though it's just incontrovertible fact. And if somebody who says it has a PhD and has written books, then, well, maybe you're likely to believe them. But friends, you only have to read a few verses of this very first psalm to see what utter nonsense that is.

[12 : 45] It's contradicted right in front of you. Look. He is speaking in a way that is as plain as the nose on my face. As my family will tell you, that's a very plain thing.

He is speaking of a judgment that will cause a permanent separation between those, verse 5, who will stand, that is, who will keep standing, who will be maintained, and those who will collapse and perish, who will end up in permanent ruin.

Now, in my Bible, that is very plain. Is it not very plain in yours? Now, of course, it's not using exactly the same language as the New Testament. The New Testament tends to talk a lot about this life and about the life to come, this world and the world to come, and so on.

But the psalmist here very clearly sees the life that he is talking about as a permanent life, as a life that stretches out beyond physical death and beyond judgment.

And it's a life that's characterized either by verse 6, the permanent presence of the Lord who knows the way of the righteous, or by that awful last line, being cut off from the presence of the Lord.

[14 : 01] Perishing is the word he uses. Now, this is not an isolated example lest you think, well, here's just one little thing that contradicts all the rest.

I want to show you just a little bit of the clear evidence of this just in another place, in the very next book of the Bible, the book of Proverbs. If you turn over to Proverbs chapter 10, first of all, we saw some of this last year when we studied very briefly in the book of Proverbs.

But what you'll see in the book of Proverbs is many perspectives on life as being permanent in exactly the same way as we find in this psalm and many of the other psalms. Life which is, yes, punctuated by physical death, but nevertheless is not ended by that death, but leads on to something that is permanent, that is unbroken, that is a life lived before the presence of the Lord. So, just look at chapter 10 of Proverbs. This is where the Proverbs of Solomon really begin.

Chapters 1 to 9 are introductory and begins properly in chapter 10.

And what do we see right away in verse 2 of chapter 10? Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.

[15 : 22] Righteousness delivers from death. There's a deliverance through physical death for those that God calls righteous. Turn over to Peter chapter 12 in verse 28.

In the path of the righteous or in the path of righteousness is life and in its pathway there is no death.

Do you see? Hence verse 27 of chapter 12. Or is it chapter...

No. Chapter 13 verse 9. The light of the righteous rejoices but the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

In chapter 13 verse 14. The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life that one may turn away from the snares of death.

A life beyond death is what he's talking about. Look at chapter 14 and verse 32. Again, we see so clearly here that death is a parting of the ways.

[16:29] The wicked is overthrown through his evil doing but the righteous finds refuge in his death. Refuge in his death. Do you see?

Turn over just a few more to chapter 23 verse 17. I can show you many more of these. I'm just picking some of the most obvious ones. Chapter 23 verse 17.

Again, very striking. Let not your heart envy sinners. But continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. Surely there is a future and your hope will not be cut off.

There's a future for those who fear the Lord. That word future there is the word that's often used to translate in the prophets the latter end or the latter days. The great days of the future.

The days of the kingdom of God that is coming. One more. Chapter 24 verse 14. Know that wisdom is such to your soul.

[17:29] If you find it there will be a future latter days and your hope will not be cut off. Look down to verse 20.

For the evil man has no future. The lamp of the wicked will be put out. You see there is a future for the one but there is no future for the evil one.

Now that is so perfectly plain. And I can show you many many other places all through the Old Testament going right back to Genesis where it's equally plain.

And my conclusion therefore has to be that people who say those sorts of things about the Old Testament simply haven't actually read the Bible. But it's vital to see this because when we read a psalm like the one we're reading or when we read the Proverbs very often people will say what's being taught?

There is a sort of prosperity gospel. It's a misleading theology that's promising blessing now for righteousness in purely material terms. Rather like verse 3 of our psalm sometimes seems to be saying doesn't it?

[18:37] That prosperity that's being talked about. But that is not so when you see that the wisdom writer and the psalmists are not viewing life in a sort of this life and then the next life way.

Rather they are seeing life as one permanent unbroken life. A life that is lived in the presence of the Lord who is himself life.

Do you remember when we were studying Deuteronomy there's that great word of Moses in Deuteronomy 30 I think it's verse 20 where he says love the Lord obey him for he is your life.

He is your length of days. And that word length of days is so often translated as forever. I will dwell in the house of the Lord for length of days forever.

He is your life. He is your forever life. The Lord himself. And so this promise of prosperity is a very real promise for this real permanent life.

[19:42] For life now and life stretching into the future with God. He's not promising mere spiritual prosperity. prosperity now and spiritual prosperity then.

Rather he's talking about the whole of our life lived before the Lord and he is promising real lasting solid prosperity that will remain real and solid even through our death physically and even through God's judgment that is to come.

A life that will not be blown away at the last like chaff because it's found to be worthless. That's exactly what the apostle Paul picks up and speaks about in 1 Corinthians 3.

Don't look it up. You can read it later. But remember he talks about the day of judgment and he says that that day will disclose at last with absolute clarity what has been true all along whether our life has really been a prosperity built on wood and hay and stubble which will just blow away like the chaff or whether in fact it is all along being built on gold and silver and precious stones.

And that day won't reveal some sort of different kind of prosperity it will just reveal to us what prosperity has really always actually been.

[21:10] Yes of course it can be hard to see it can't it in a messy world in a mixed up world. It can be hard to see what the psalmist seems to see so clearly here about the righteous and the wicked.

Just as it can be hard to see can't it sometimes the difference between real and fake gemstones or tell the difference between a solidly built house or a cherry built house.

Until of course the earthquake comes and the one stands and the other falls flat and then you know. But the trained eye can see very often in advance can't it?

The trained eye can see where the real quality is now. Where the real profit is now that others might only see later actually when it's far too late. That's what you want the people who are investing your pension fund to be seeing isn't it?

To see things that have long term value and to be buying those so that your pension doesn't disappear when you come to retire. That's what you want the auctioneer and the expert from Sotheby's to be able to tell you when you take your piece of furniture or your artwork or whatever it is to be auctioned.

[22 : 23] You want somebody who knows the true value who can see it and who knows what's going to be paid for it. And what the psalmist is doing in this psalm is he's training our eye to see with clear long term vision.

To give us a true perspective on our prosperity and to do that we must take in the permanence of life as well as just the present life.

Because only when we do that will we begin to see in the present where true prosperity really does lie. If I take my glasses off even the near things are blurred and all of you I can't really tell anybody. But by the wonders of very focal lenses I put them on and all is clear. Clarity in the present merges seamlessly into clarity in what is distant.

And the psalmist is saying to us put your very focal glasses on. See the present in the light of the permanent. And see that it's but part of that permanent life which stretches out and stretches on and will stretch on beyond the judgment.

[23 : 36] Because only when you put that perspective into your thinking will the perplexity of life's questions just begin to make sense for you. And friends life is otherwise full of all kinds of perplexities.

All kinds of questions. Even for us as Christian believers if we don't have our glasses properly on. If we don't see the present in the light of the permanent future that the Bible tells us is absolutely real. Just turn to one more cross reference. Sorry about all these cross references this evening. But another psalm. Psalm 73. I just want you to see how consistent the Bible is and how consistent the psalms are on all these questions.

And here's another very clear example of how blurred vision, confused vision becomes clear sight when we get this truth about the permanence of life straight.

So Psalm 73 verse 1 makes it clear to us here is a Christian believer speaking. Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. And yet you see here's a believer who's troubled because the world that he sees seems to be so out of step with what God seems to indicate to him it should be.

[24 : 57] Verse 3. I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no pangs until death. Their bodies are fat and sleek. They're not in trouble as others are.

They're not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace. Violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness. Their hearts overflow. They scoff. They speak with malice. Loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens and their tongues strut through the earth. Therefore his people turn back to them and find no fault in them.

And they say, how can God know? Is there knowledge in the most high? Behold, these are the wicked. Always at ease. They increase in riches. And all in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands.

In innocence. He can't understand it. It's absolutely at variance to what God seems to be telling him. Verse 16, when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task.

[26 : 05] Sounds like Ecclesiastes, doesn't it? The wearisome task of trying to understand the perplexity of how things seem to be in this world. He could not understand it until verse 17.

Do you see? Until I went into the sanctuary of God and then I discerned their end, their latter day, their future.

Same word as we've been seeing in the Psalms and the Proverbs. And now, all of a sudden, it's clear because he's got his very focal lenses on. And he sees there is a judgment coming.

There's a winnowing coming. Just like Psalm 1, these apparently prosperous ones. Look at verse 18 here. You set them in slippery places. You will make them fall to ruin.

However, they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors. But, by contrast, verse 23, do you see? I am continually with you.

[27 : 13] You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel and afterward, you will receive me to glory. You see, it's just the same again, isn't it?

To grasp true prosperity, what it really is to prosper in life, to be fruitful, to be satisfied in this present life. we have to see it in terms of this permanent life.

And that alone is the key to happiness, to fulfillment, to fruitfulness, even in the present. By the way, what's the heart of this permanent life, this fruitful life that he's speaking about?

It's there in the very last verse, isn't it? Psalm 73. See what he says? It's being near the living God. It's having the Lord God as your refuge.

It's just like Psalm 1 verse 6. It's about knowing God, he says there, and being known by him. The Lord knows the way of the righteous.

[28 : 22] Not just knowing about him, notice, but knowing him and him knowing you intimately, personally. You know that word is used in the Bible even of the intimate knowledge of the marriage bed.

It's about knowing truly, personally. The key to present prosperity and to permanent prosperity.

The key to all that matters in life, what the whole of life is all about. He's saying he's found in knowing and being known by the Lord God. The only God.

The God of the Bible. That's the key to happiness. That's the key to life. It's the only thing that matters. Knowing him and being known by him.

That's why the Lord Jesus came to this earth. That's why we've just celebrated Christmas. Because in Jesus, God made himself known as Emmanuel, as God with us, so that you and I can know him and be known by him.

[29 : 25] and know life in all its fullness, in all its abundance and know it beginning now but never ending, going on forever.

Because he knows us and because we know him, that will be true. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says and how he puts it in Romans chapter 8.

Because we know him and he knows us, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it's written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in even all these things we are more than conquerors.

That's prosperity through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[30 : 40] Do you want that true prosperity in this present life? That true fruitfulness of life?

And that security and that joy forever of a permanent life knowing and being known by and being loved by this God? And it's all about knowing him.

Listen to Jesus. This is eternal life that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Whoever has seen me said Jesus has seen the Father and knows him.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and they know me. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.

It means the key and the only key to prosperity is seeing that permanent life in Jesus Christ and the determining that you will find it and you will have it now in this present life in Christ in God made known being known by him and knowing him.

[31 : 55] that's the only way to true happiness fruitfulness and prosperity for any one of us. It's the only way to happiness and fruitfulness and prosperity for all the people that you love.

It's the only way to true life. But it's a way that's open because of our great Savior Christ Jesus our Lord.

For as the psalmist says the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked those who don't know him and are not known by him that way we'll perish.

Well let's pray. Heavenly Father how we thank you that you have known us and loved us forever in Jesus Christ your Son you so loved this world you sent him to be our Savior even when we were enemies even when we were still sinners our Lord Jesus Christ died to make us whole so help us we pray every one of us to know you and go on knowing you be known by you and joyfully to make you known for we ask it in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen