

# The Penitent Life

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 27 January 2019

Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're going to read now in our Bibles, and we're going to read Psalm number 1 together. First of all, we'll have the reading in Farsi, and then since some of us don't really understand Farsi quite properly yet, we'll read it in English for the rest of us too.

But Saeed's going to read first of all in Farsi, Psalm 1. Farsi, Psalm 1.  
Psalm 1.

Who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, who stands not in the way of sinners, and who sits not in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law, the instruction of the Lord.  
And on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water. It yields its fruit in season, and its leaf does not wither.

[ 1 : 59 ] 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. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous.

But the way of the wicked will perish. Amen. May God bless to us his word. We're going to sing again now.

And the way of the chupties. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Let's turn again to Psalm number one. If you've been here at the Kelvin Grove evening service the last couple of weeks, you'll know that this is our third look at Psalm one, which we've been calling the gateway to the whole book of Psalms.

[ 3 : 18 ] If you've not been here, don't worry. Hopefully tonight will make sense all the same. I think it's a short psalm and it should be easy for us, I think, to pick up.

We're looking at this because the Psalms are not just songs. They are songs, great songs, full of rich knowledge about God and about ourselves. But, of course, they are, therefore, a rich teaching resource.

They teach us about God and they teach us about ourselves. And they teach us particularly about how to make sense of all of life in relation to him.

If you read through the book of Psalms, you'll find every emotion you can think of is there, is contained in the Psalms. There's joy and sorrow. There's excitement.

There's despair. There's life and death. There's illness. There's health. There's every contrasting aspect of our human existence expressed before the living God.

[ 4 : 21 ] But, in a way, the doorway, the entrance through which we come into the whole book of Psalms is really these first two Psalms, Psalm 1 and 2, which may well have been one Psalm altogether in the beginning.

And these Psalms show us the way into a life of blessing, a life of fulfillment and fullness with God himself. And Psalm 1, at the very start of the book, makes an absolutely clear and unambiguous statement that God's word, that is God's law, his Torah, his instruction, his instruction rules his world.

And that means that the only way to understanding, the only way to begin to make sense of this world, to make sense of our lives in it, is to listen to his word and to love his word and to live by his word.

Verse 1, blessed is the man, happy, fruitful, fulfilled is the man. And verse 2, who delights in the law and the instruction of the Lord.

That and that alone is the key, is the key to present prosperity in this life. That's the key to the life that's pictured in verses 3 and 4 of this tree, this flourishing, fruit-bearing tree, which is strong and resilient in the face of heat in the face of drought, and is not withering because, note, it is planted

into the source of life, into the life-giving stream of water.

[ 6 : 04 ] That's the life of the one whose roots in life are in the life-giving, in the life-preserving word of the living God. And we've already seen that this prosperity that Psalm is talking about is real.

This is not a pretend thing. And it is in the present life. It's not just a vague hope of pie in the sky when you die. It's real in this human experience.

But also, we saw what this real prosperity is. It's a fruitful life of blessing which lasts. It's a prosperity that really is permanent.

And that's absolutely vital to grasp because we can only begin to grasp the reality of what prosperity is. We can only begin to grasp the reality of what our existing is in this present life when we realize that it is a permanent reality, our human existence.

That there is an existence that goes on beyond what the psalmist calls in verse 5, if you look, the judgment. Do you see the judgment? There will be an event, says the psalmist, says the whole Bible, an event that straddles this ongoing path of life and with which every one of us will be confronted.

[ 7 : 24 ] And the Bible calls it the judgment. And look at verse 4. It describes it very graphically. It will be a time of winnowing. When the grain is tossed and when the chaff is just scattered away like dust.

And only the righteous, do you see? Only the righteous will stand, will keep standing in that day, says the psalmist. Not the wicked, verse 5.

Do you see? Not sinners. What will happen to them? They will collapse. They, verse 6, they will perish. It's a way of permanent ruin, of loss, of eternal collapse.

That's the picture. And you see the psalmist says, unless you see that, unless you see the need in your search for present prosperity, for a prosperity that will last, that is permanent as well as present.

And as you see that, then anything that you might be thinking of as present prosperity is, in fact, useless. It's just an illusion.

[ 8 : 37 ] Because it will let you down in the end and it will do so in a horrifying way, in a terrifying way. If you don't see that, the reality of a permanent future, then you will inevitably have blurred vision about what is real and important in this present life.

And you will totally misjudge what is really important in human life now, in this world. As I said, if I take my glasses off, the things in the distance become very, very blurry indeed.

And even the things much, much closer are quite blurred and confused. So yes, you see, the psalmist says, and indeed the whole Bible says, the Old Testament and the New Testament, we saw that last time.

That day, that judgment day is certain. That day is coming. And that day will at last make all things clear. But then, on that day of clarity, it will be too late.

To change course. Just as one day, we're told by the scientists, there's going to be another enormous earthquake in California on the San Andreas Fault.

[ 9 : 50 ] And on that day, there will be a great visible separation, won't there, between all the buildings that have been properly engineered and properly built since the last great earthquake.

And those that actually have been jerry-built, have been put up on the cheap and look good. But on that day, we'll actually collapse. And you see, if you're going to go and buy a property in California today, unless you are thinking about that day and the needs of that day, you might very well make your choice along all the wrong kind of criteria.

Just look at a property that looks terrific. But you're not thinking about the piling down into the rock and into the fortified concrete and all the things that alone will cause that building to stand on the day of that great earthquake.

And that's exactly the way the Bible says we have to think about our world and our choices in life today, our choices in life every single day.

And the psalmist is telling us loud and clear. Your understanding of present prosperity must take into account the need to have a prosperity that will last, that will remain standing.

[ 11 : 05 ] Because only that actually is real prosperity in this present life at all. And the heart of that prosperity, what is it?

Well, remember verse 6, look. It's knowing the one true God, the Lord, the God of the Bible, and being known by him.

The Lord knows the way of the righteous. That's the heart of true and lasting prosperity in human life.

Because if you don't have that, if the Lord does not know you, well, look at the alternative in the last line. It's awful, isn't it? That the way of the wicked will perish.

And there's no other way to happiness that is real and lasting permanently. There's no other way to true happiness now than this intimate knowledge of God.

[12:08] This real and living relationship with the Lord, the only true God, the only one there is. Now, we've seen all of that already, but we haven't yet exhausted the message of this little psalm.

Because if the thing that matters above all is this relationship with the Lord that is real, that is present, that is permanent, then we need to ask the question, don't we?

What does that look like? And how can I have that lasting prosperity? What is it that makes you one of these righteous people as opposed to one of the wicked who will perish?

You'll be blown away like chaff. That's a big question, isn't it? It's a really big question. And the psalm answers it very, very clearly for us in the third picture of happiness that it draws for us.

We've seen that it's a prosperous life in verses 3 and 4, like a fruitful tree. We've seen that that life is the permanent life in verses 5 and 6. It stands in the judgment, not collapsing.

[13:13] But lastly, look at verses 1 and 2. We're sort of going back to front here. But it makes clear to us, doesn't it, that a happy life, a truly happy life is, well, it's a penitent life.

That sounds extraordinary, doesn't it, that true happiness lies in penitence? But that's the truth, so I want us to think about that for the rest of our time this evening. First of all, I think we have to tackle on an issue that might be troubling some of us.

And it's this very stark, very unpolitically correct, apparently judgmental division that lies at the heart of this psalm.

Between the righteous, who have it all, who receive great blessing, unending blessing. And the wicked, who collapse, who perish, who face absolute ruin.

A total and stark contrast. And it may seem to some of us tonight, well, that is very harsh. Surely it can't be so black and white. Surely we can't be so fundamentalist about these sorts of things.

[14:24] We know that life isn't so simple, is it? We can't be simplistic about dividing everybody into just two categories of people. Surely, surely there's a whole spectrum of the human race and the way people are.

And surely we should be talking about those who are more righteous and those who are more wicked than others. It's a relative scale. It can't possibly be an absolute category like this, can it? I think that's the way most of us think, and certainly that is the way many people think in our society today. And most of us, in fact, I would say every single one of us has our own particular scale of morality and of righteousness.

Whatever our outlook, whatever our politics is, every one of us has a scale of those that we think are better than others and where we sit somewhere along that scale.

If you're a very socially conservative person, perhaps a politically conservative person, your natural newspaper is something like the Daily Mail or something like that, well, what is your scale of saints and sinners?

[15:32] Probably the top of your sort of saintly scale will be people like, you know, Florence Nightingale and Mother Teresa. Mary Berry, Margaret Thatcher.

She'll be pretty near the top, I would think, those of you who can remember. Down at the bottom, it's the drug addicts, isn't it? It's the gamblers, it's the yobs, it's the hoodies. It's Laura Kunzberg and people like that on the BBC.

Certainly Jeremy Corbyn, very probably Nicola Sturgeon. She'll be pretty low down. Donald Trump, he's really near the bottom, isn't he? Well, maybe not actually, maybe not for some of you.

Maybe if you're different, if you're a social liberal, maybe your paper is The Guardian, that sort of thing. Well, you'll be different, won't you? But you'll still have your scale. The city fat cats will be up near the top of your scale of disgrace.

Disgraced Tory politicians. That'll be pretty low down on yours, like Jonathan Akin, people like that. Donald Trump will definitely be at the bottom of yours.

[16:35] Near the top will be Barack Obama, won't it? Bob Geldof, maybe. Bono. He might be really near the top, St. Bono, for some of you. Maybe Ellen Musk of Tesla.

It's going to stop all the nasty gas-guzzling cars. That sort of thing. I'm joking a bit, but we've all got our scales, haven't we? Everybody's got our scales of where we fit in.

You go to a prison and you will find a very clear pecking order on a scale of the righteous and the wicked, won't you? Who's absolutely at the bottom? The child sex offenders. Just above them, the other sex offenders.

Maybe then the murderers, the robbers, and then various others. Everybody knows where they fit in the scale of righteousness and wickedness.

And most of us ourselves, I think, would place ourselves, well, because we're British, not probably in the A category, maybe A minus, but probably B plus, somewhere around there. I think that would be about right, wouldn't it?

[ 17 : 35 ] Probably not at the top, but certainly above all sorts of people that we despise, that we look down on. The people that we can look at and say, well, at least I'm not as bad as him. I'm not as wicked as her.

And we would be safely above that cut-off point that puts us safely within the camp of the righteous. Our model league table will place us way above those who we're quite happy to name and shame. But let's just get this absolutely clear, shall we? The Bible's picture, the picture that we have here in verses 1 and 2 of this psalm, is not a picture of that kind of moral contest at all.

The righteous and the wicked here in this psalm, indeed all the way through the Bible, is not a statement of those who are good morally and those who are bad morally.

Whatever your scale may be, it doesn't matter what it is, it is not that at all. Rather, it's simply a description of whether or not you are yourself in right relationship with God.

[ 18 : 50 ] Whether you are known by him and are righteous and will therefore stand through the judgment. Or whether you are not known by him and therefore you are wicked and you'll be blown away like the chaff and perish.

It's much, much more fundamental than a matter of mere morals. Because it's all a matter of what your personal life source really is.

Of the stream that this tree draws all its vigor from, all its sustenance from. Verses 1 and 2, you see, if you look at them, they paint two very different streams of life.

Look at them, you'll see. You see, the one stream, the one tree, if you like, is being fed and watered and planted in living relationship with the world.

And the other is sustained and fed and rooted quite differently. It is sustained in the revelation of God. Not in the world of man, but wholly from the Word of God.

[ 20 : 05 ] The righteous, according to this psalm, is the one who is in right relationship to the one true God. And therefore, he is the one who rejects utterly a defining relationship with the world of man.

But rather, he loves and delights by total contrast in the Word, not of man, but of God. You can always tell if a love relationship is real, can't you?

Or if it's not real. If there's interest and excitement and delight in the words of the other person.

When somebody's in love with somebody else, you can tell they're lit up when something buzzes on their phone and it's from that person.

When they get a phone call, when they get a letter, when they get a text. They're excited by the words of the person that they love. By contrast, when a relationship is breaking down, that's the first thing to go, isn't it?

It's words. Well, we just don't talk anymore. We can't communicate. And that's because words are the things that convey the deepest things about ourselves.

[ 21 : 12 ] Words are the things that tell other people what lights you up, what turns you on, what excites you, what makes you. Excited about life. The sort of person who's always going on about train spotting.

You know, taking out their notebook and noting down train numbers and things. A mystery to me, but some people it does it for them. Or some people are always going on about the football, aren't you? Strike up a conversation within one minute.

They're talking about the latest league position. Well, you know, they're a football person. Or they're a computer buff. Or they're always talking about hens and eggs and things like that. Everyone's very disappointed. They only won three first prizes last week in the National Scottish Championships.

But have a chat to Edward. You know he's interested in hens. Because he talks about them. Well, you see, the righteous, the one who is known by God in this psalm, the one who's in real relationship with God, is the one who's lit up, who's animated, who's delighted by God's words, by his Torah, his instruction.

By every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. That tells you. And he is equally resolute, says the psalmist, in his rejection of the words and ways of the world.

[ 22 : 26 ] He's turning his back on the world and its ways. And he's turning towards God and his words and his ways and cherishing them. And all through his life, that's the constant pattern.

That's what verses 1 and 2 are telling us. Look at the three negatives there. Not the world. Not the world. Not the world. First, verse 1, he says, No, to the counsel of the wicked.

To the advice. To the thinking. To all the wisdom of this world. That so dominates our culture all around us. Just what Paul was speaking about this morning. The world's intellectual life.

So obsessed today by gender ideology and all these sorts of things. The world's arts and media so obsessed with the secularist agenda. The world's advertising all around us so focused on pure materialism.

But he says no to that. Second, he says no to the way of sinners. That is to the behavior, to the morality of the world. Which is so pervasive and so persuasive in our culture today.

[ 23 : 33 ] Again, as we were hearing this morning from Daniel chapter 3. With its acceptance. And now with its promotion of sexuality, for example.

That is so anti-God's word. So it's almost impossible now for somebody on a radio program or a TV program to even dare to say that they think there's something wrong with the particular agenda for homosexuality or for transgenderism or whatever it is.

But he says no to that. Thirdly, he says no to the seat of scoffers. That is to the settled attitudes of the world. To the whole world view that so dominates our world today.

All the givens of our cultural life. The pluralism that tells us that all religions are just the same. That all ways are equally valid. That your truth and my truth and his truth can all be true at the same time.

Even though they totally differ. The scorn of the absolutes. Of right and wrong. The morality of scripture and all of these things.

[ 24 : 41 ] But the man of God says no. No to this whole onslaught of the world's wisdom. The world's advice. The world's morality. The world's attitudes.

Just like Daniel and his three friends. He does not bow down to the idol of the age that all around are bowing down to. But instead, verse 2, do you see, by absolute contrast, he says yes to the instruction of the Lord.

The one true God. The God of scripture. Not just grudging acceptance, verse 2, but delight. Delight in his law and his instruction. He meditates on it. He ruminates on it day and night.

It becomes part of the fabric of his whole outlook on life and his whole way of life. And the psalmist says that's what righteousness looks like.

That's what knowing God means and being known by God. It's the penitent life. It's a whole way of life that is constantly turning away from the world's ways and the world's words.

[ 25 : 52 ] Repentance. Turning away. And it's turning towards God and his words and his way of life. In faith and trust in him. Repentance.

Turning away from the world. Faith. Turning towards God and his word. And that's what right relationship with God means according to the Bible. That's what righteousness is.

Rightness. Things are right. Because you're turning away from what is false and you're turning towards what is true. You're turning away from the road that leads to death. And you're turning towards the road that leads to the life of God.

God. But by contrast, the psalmist says the wicked, the wicked are not just the hex murderers, not the pedophiles, not Osama bin Laden, not Adolf Hitler.

But he says it's all who do not so delight in the word of the Lord, the one true God. The wicked is the one who says no to the word of the Lord and yes to the words and the ways of the world.

[ 26 : 59 ] It's as simple as that. That makes you sit up and think, doesn't it? Or it ought to. Our whole idea of this league table of righteousness and where we might be and all of that is absolutely and utterly wrong.

What matters and the only thing that matters is whether you hear and you heed God's word. And reject the world's word.

And you need to be careful. Look at the progression in verses 1 and 2. There's a progression, isn't there, from walking to standing to sitting.

You can't think that you can have it both ways. That you can have a little bit of the words wisdom and ways and that won't do you any harm. No, the counsel of the world, the advice, the wisdom, the thinking of the word leads inevitably to the ways of the world.

To the behavior and the morality of the world. To how you live. And that, if you keep going that way, leads inevitably and ultimately to a fixed destiny. It means what you are, what you have become, will be rooted in this world.

[ 28 : 07 ] Not just defying God in your actions, but scoffing ultimately at him. Celebrating all that is opposed to him.

Friends, some of us maybe need to wake up to that reality. You cannot presume upon God. You can't. You may think that you can have one foot in the world's counsel and one foot in the world's ways and still be safe in the church of Christ.

But you can't. That's a dangerous slope. It's a slippery slope and it only leads to ruin. If you think like that, then according to the apostle of Christ, you're already being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Read Hebrews chapter 3 later on. You'll see where the apostle warns the New Testament church of the very real possibility that they can be exactly like the people of Israel.

Who were redeemed, saved by God out of the land of Egypt, but then refused entry to his promised land because of their sin. They were unable to enter because they fell away because of their unbelief, their disobedience.

[ 29 : 21 ] If you don't believe the apostle, read Jesus himself. In many places, but one place will be Matthew 24, where he repeatedly says, doesn't he? In the last days, the days in which we live, many in the church, he says, will be led astray, will fall away because they're being led by the world's ways and not by God's word.

And Jesus says it's the one who endures to the end who'll be saved. And if you start listening to the world and begin walking in the world's ways, you will, in the end, find yourself rooted with the world in the world's scorn of God.

And therefore, at the last, uprooted forever, blown away like chaff, collapsing into eternal ruin.

For the way of the wicked will perish. Make no mistake about that. I fear for some of you youngsters that you're not taking that seriously.

You're living a double life. You're here in church on Sunday. For the rest of the week, your life really is indistinguishable from those around you in the world.

[ 30 : 41 ] Some of you are getting plastered drunk some of the nights of the week. Some of you are behaving sexually in a very promiscuous way, just like everybody else. Don't think church leaders are stupid, you know.

I did not come up the Clyde in a banana boat. I've been around the block a few times. Some of the other church leaders here. We're not idiots. We see things. We hear things. We know things. Other of us are doing things that are no different.

Perhaps even worse things. You can be worldly in a crass way, can't you? You can be worldly in a very covert way. And sometimes you can fool a lot of people a lot of the time. But you can't fool God.

He sees. Listen to me. This psalm alone tells us that that kind of way leads inevitably to collapse and to ruin.

Because it begins by suppressing the truth of God's word. You turn to the lies of this world instead of the truth of God.

[ 31 : 48 ] Read Romans chapter 1. The inevitable consequence of that. Of refusing to acknowledge of God. In the end, God gives people over to their depraved mind.

So they end up not just doing these things with the rest of the world, but approving of them, even celebrating them. Begin walking in that way.

Begin thinking in that way. And you will end up in the seat of scoffers permanently. I've seen it. And many of us have seen it.

So this psalm issues a clear warning to every one of us who professes Christ. Do not start down that road. Don't. And if you are started down that road, turn around now. Now. Not tomorrow. Now. Before it's too late. Turn away from the voice of the world and turn towards the voice of God.

[ 32 : 48 ] And repent. Have faith. Listen to him. The only alternative, the psalmist is telling us, the only possible alternative is utter ruin and collapse.

You shall perish. It's a clear, it's a necessary warning to all of us. Constantly. You need it. I need it. We all need it.

But it is also a great encouragement, friends, because there is a way, says the psalmist. There is a way of prosperity and happiness now and permanently forever. And it is this way of penitence every day, day by day, just turning back from the siren voices of this world.

And turning towards the pure voice, the living voice of the Lord our God. Delighting in his words. And following in his way. You cannot and you will not have a happy and fruitful life or a life that will last if you don't delight yourself in the instruction of the Lord.

[ 33 : 52 ] And in that whole revelation of God about himself that he has given us in his word. And has come to a climax in the great revelation in the gospel of his son.

In whom he has come in the flesh to give us his word. So the response that he demands of every one of us who would possess this life.

This life of permanent fruitfulness. The fulfillment of joy. It's so simple. It's not easy. But it is not complicated.

Turn from the world. And bow down to the Lord Jesus Christ. Delight in him. Delight in his words. Submit to his authority over your life.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous. Those who love the Lord Jesus. Those who are led by the Lord Jesus and by his words. He knows them and loves them and will save them forever and ever.

[ 34 : 51 ] But those who refuse that gospel of grace day by day in him. Well that way is the way that will perish.

The way of the wicked will perish. There's only one way to go isn't there? Only one way. Why would anyone want to go any other way?

And so the psalm says the key to life is to go that way. Jesus way. Today.

Tomorrow. Every day. And to keep one another walking in that way. Which is the only way of life. Well let's pray together. Almighty God. Give us grace. We pray. That we may cast away the works of darkness.

[ 35 : 54 ] And put upon us the armor of light. Now. In the time of this mortal life. In which thy son Jesus Christ came to visit us. In great humility.

So that in the last day. When he shall come again. In his glorious majesty. To judge both the quick and the dead. We may rise.

To the life immortal. Through him who lives and reigns with thee. And the Holy Spirit. One God. Now and forever. Amen.

I won.

Peace.