

THE PORTRAIT OF THE RIGHTEOUS MAN Psalm 1

When I was in college I took an Art Appreciation class. But, being a freshman, I planned poorly. See, the class was an 8 am class and I was having too much fun in my first year in college to get enough sleep for an 8 am class. So, after the professor called roll, she would start showing slides. And when the lights went out, so did I. I ended up with a 'D' in a class that you were supposed to get an 'easy A' in.

There have been a number of times I wish that I had paid attention in class, because art is something that I have really come to enjoy. There's one artist who sticks out to me: Rembrandt. Rembrandt always had something interesting to say with his paintings and particularly his self-portraits. Sometimes he painted himself as a model of virtue and sometimes as a Pharisee.

The psalmist in Psalm 1 is painting a picture of the ideal Israelite. He's asking the question, 'If I could give my children an example to follow, what would that example look like?'

Have you ever thought about what 'a righteous person in God's sight looks like'? We learn here a few things that a believer in the days of King David would strive for:

1. He chooses wise advisors, good company. The first attribute of a righteous man is his wisdom- what better test of wisdom than whom your friends are? The picture here is not just of being in the company of evil-doers, but doing what they say. "Walking in the counsel of the wicked" is not standing around watching when the bully beats up the new kid- it's actually being one of the bullies.
2. He keeps the Torah. A Jewish person would have heard Verse 2 in relation to the Sabbath and in connection with being a student of God's Word. A righteous person knows the Scriptures inside and out and does their best to keep God's commands.
3. He has strong character- a tree planted by water has the best chance at life, it's not easily swayed. The contrast here is chaff- straw that's not really good for anything. This reminds me of Ephesians 4:14. How do you stay strong? By having deep roots nurtured in the living water of the gospel.
4. A key element of the righteous man life is that he is known and loved by the Lord, therefore He has a seat in the heavenly sanctuary. This is in contrast to the wicked man who won't be able to stand on judgment day, but will be cast out.

This is a pretty good self-portrait the Psalmist is painting, isn't it? Except that this isn't a self-portrait. David's painting someone else's picture. We get a big hint of that in verse 5, 'nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.' Well, for all the things David was, he was certainly a sinner. This is the same man who committed adultery and murder and then wrote an amazing song of confession about it. David knew he was a sinner.

In fact, it's significant that this is Psalm 1, because David starts a theme here that will be repeated over and over in the Psalms and in Proverbs- a portrait of 'the righteous man.'

Psalm 37:29 says, 'The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever.' The big question when we read that is, 'How do I get in that category?'

Psalm 37:39, 'The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord.' It's outside of ourselves. It's what Martin Luther called 'alien righteousness.'

There's a reason this is written in the 3rd person singular- 'blessed is the man'- David's telling us that it's not him. *But He's also telling us that it's not you or me.*

Jesus is the righteous man of God and we're not. How freeing is it that Jesus is the righteous man here and you don't have to be? How great is it that Jesus is the man that you couldn't be even if you tried your best?

Think about it- have you ever listened to the counsel of the wicked? Have you kept the Sabbath morning and evening? Have you immersed yourself in the Word of God? Are you ok with the Lord knowing everything you do? Can you stand up to His perfect judgment?

You don't want this to be a test for you. Because if it were, you'd fail. And so would I. On our own, we would not be able to stand in the congregation of the righteous- because **we're sinners**. We deserve judgment.

That's where the good news kicks in. Everything Jesus did, He did for you. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, "God made Him who had no sin to become sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus fulfilled all righteousness- on your behalf. As a pastor named John Stone likes to say, when Jesus fed the 5,000 it's as if you and I did as well. When Jesus changed the water into wine, it's as though we did as well. That's what it means to be united to Christ- to be so identified with Him, that when He died, we also died, and when He was resurrected, so we were raised to new life.

This is Paul's point in Romans 5 when he says that in Adam, all died. So in Christ, all who trust in Him will live. When He was judged, we all were judged. When He was rewarded, we all were rewarded. And when He comes into His kingdom, He promises us that we'll reign with Him. He lived a perfect life, so that you and I could be counted among the righteous. So that we could stand before the judgment seat of God.

So, you say, this Psalm doesn't apply to me then, does it? Of course it does. Once you start to ask the right question. The right question is not, 'What do I have to do to get to heaven?' The right question is, 'How should I now live, in light of the fact that Jesus Christ lived and went before me?' The answer is, if you wanna know how to live like Jesus, look at His picture. And a good snapshot of Him is right here in Psalm 1.

That's the gospel- God hasn't called you to be or to do anything that He hasn't done first, and that He doesn't enable you to do by the Holy Spirit.

There's an implicit warning here too: Everything in the Psalm is true- if you are righteous, you will find your delight in the law of the Lord. You will prosper, and you will not be blown away in the last judgment. On the other hand, if you love the counsel of the wicked, if you have no roots, if you stand to be judged on your own, you will be thrown out of the kingdom of heaven. That's why you need Jesus.

Come to Jesus, He'll change your affections- He'll give you deep roots, and He'll make you fit for heaven.

Blessed is the man who walks in the way of the Lord.